

Changing Fronts in La Lucha Chicana:  
The Cultural Construction of Class, Race, and Gender  
in Chicano/a Literature

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## INTRODUCTION

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the total Latina/o population numbered 35.3 million of the U.S. population, almost six times greater than 1990. The number of U.S. Latinos increased 58 percent in the last decade, from 22.4 million in 1990 to 35.3 million in 2000. Our calculations collected by the U.S. Census Bureau, project that Latinos will account for almost half of the population growth in the United States between 2000 and 2020. By 2050, Latino youth are expected to comprise 29% of the youth population. Of course the statistic for the year 2050 is just a forecast of the possible future demographic, based upon the rapid growth of the Latino/a population over the past couple of years. Two-thirds of U.S. Latinos are of Mexican descent and over 80% of Latino youth are U.S.-born.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, Chicanos specifically, have drastically shifted the demographics of the United States and therefore affected communities, labor, politics, education, and cultural production in the U.S. Globalization has a large impact on the speed and intensity of population growth. As it has become evident, economic globalization such as trade has created close foreign relations between Mexico and the United States, especially in the U.S. colonies that line the border between the United States and Mexico.

Mexican culture in particular has a profound effect on the United States and vice versa. Edna Acosta-Belén claims that the increased population growth and visibility of Chicanos in recent decades and the work that is being produced by many Chicano writers and scholars is leading us to pay more attention to the common denominators and the cultural bridges that have existed during various historical periods between [Mexico and

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. 2000. Latino Population Estimates and Projections.

the United States]. Jaime Puche insists that Mexicans must “cling to our culture so that it will survive.”<sup>2</sup> Both cultures are clashing as the Mexican population continues to grow, and Chicano/a (Mexican-American) studies “as an essential intellectual policy enterprise within the academy continues to grow with it.”<sup>3</sup>

Chicano/a culture encompasses dynamic meanings, which continues to be a focus of contention with regard to its analytical usefulness and its capacity for outlining Chicano/a identity. Chicanos are descendants of Mexican immigrants as well as descendants of those who were living in Northern Mexico when the United States “redrew” the border. The territories of California, the entire Colorado River valley, and Texas were once a part of Mexico, and therefore this land presents a sore spot for Mexicans and Chicanos who feel that this land was taken away from them by Americans. Mexicans and Chicanos still hold resentment towards the outcome of the “War of the North American Invasion” as it is called in Mexico, or the “Mexican-American War”, as it is named by Americans. Such a discrepancy between the names of these wars may seem minor, but the “War of the North American Invasion” symbolizes a greater Mexican ideology.<sup>4</sup> This ideology is based upon the fact that the United States stole Mexican land and re-named it as “American”. The North American Invasion had negative consequences. These negative consequences caused tension between Anglos, Mexicans, and Chicanos.

Although Chicanos today have U.S. citizenship, their rights and privileges are limited due to race, gender, and class issues. North American society has a strong

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<sup>2</sup> Carlos Monsiváis, “Will Nationalism be Bilingual?,” in Mass Media and Free Trade: NAFTA and the Cultural Industries, 144.

<sup>3</sup> Carlos G. Vélez-Ibáñez and Anna Sampaio, Transnational Latina/o Communities: Politics, Processes, and Cultures, 13.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas E. Skidmore and Peter H. Smith. Modern Latin America, 258.

discriminatory reaction towards Chicanos, since they are an easily identifiable group on the basis of ethnic, racial, linguistic, and cultural factors. Skin color, accents, and Mexican culture are some of the indicators which target Chicanos a more easily identifiable group, and thus allow North Americans to minimize the rights and privileges of Chicanos. Chicanos feel a need to withdraw from American and Mexican parent cultures. Chicanas are loyally tied to both U.S. and Mexican parent cultures, although these cultures have not had their children's (Chicanas) best interests in mind as parents should. Chicano incomes are a display of the reckless behavior of American parent culture towards its Chicano children.

In 1999, the percentage of Latina/os with incomes less than \$10,000 was even larger than the percentage in poverty. The hardship this imposes is greater given the youth of these populations: 38 percent under eighteen for Mexicans as compared with only 24 percent for Anglos.<sup>5</sup> As "The Working World" section in Latino Boom states, "in Mexico, the young depart to the United States for work at such a rate that the villages left behind are entirely dependent on the cash sent home."<sup>6</sup> Evidently, there is a great need to alleviate problems of poverty and inequality in Mexico:

According to reliable sources, the proportion of Mexicans living in poverty rose from 34 percent in 1980 to 40 percent by 2000. Mexico also continued to have a highly unequal distribution of income: the richest 10 percent of the population controlled nearly 40 percent of the income (compared with 25 percent in the United States).<sup>7</sup>

As a result, numerous Mexicans have immigrated to the United States in search of better paying jobs. Unfortunately, harsh working conditions accompanied these better paying

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<sup>5</sup> Carlos G. Vélez-Ibáñez and Anna Sampaio, 9.

<sup>6</sup> John Christi and José Gonzalez, Latino Boom, 123.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Skidmore and Peter Smith, Modern Latin America, 294-295.

jobs in North America. Most of these Chicano workers have been used to fill up the lower rungs of the American economy and companies profit from this low-paid labor.

Several Chicanas of low economic status live in circumstances that adversely affect their success in the United States which add to the factors of race, gender, and class. In traditional/patriarchal society, rich white males (at the top of the social hierarchy) have many privileges, while poor women of color continue to struggle with fewer privileges. Thankfully, society is constantly changing as Chicanas gain more privileges and race becomes a null issue. At the same time gender issues are making their way to the forefront. It is difficult for Chicanas to break the circle of gender oppression. Chicanas are determined to liberate themselves from gender oppression, but have little means of doing so due to a lack of education. The lack of education among Chicana/os leads towards low-paying jobs, which onsets a vicious cycle of poverty. The educational distribution for Latinos is distinctly bottom heavy: 35% had not completed high school in 2005; the comparable figure for non-Latinos was only 6%. In the economy as a whole less educated workers faced declining prospects. Women in general, and Latinas in particular, are underrepresented in the better-paying and more prestigious professional occupations.<sup>8</sup> Besides these circumstances, many Chicanas must look to the Chicano for employment, where the outmoded man/woman relationship that existed in the home transpires in the workplace. Luis Hernández writes: “Traditionally all men (Chicanos) are considered to be superior to women (Chicanas).”<sup>9</sup> As this quote suggests it may be difficult for Chicanas to find work from another Chicano. Traditionally Chicanos expect Chicanas to take care of the children and the home. Therefore, Chicanos

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<sup>8</sup> Chon A. Noriega, *The Latino Workforce at Mid-decade*, 3.

<sup>9</sup> Linda Aguilar, “Unequal Opportunity and the Chicana,” in *Chicana Feminist Thought*, 137.

would break a societal norm by finding a job for a Chicana, especially if it were a job which is considered non-service or non-clerical. Fortunately though, as time progresses, Chicanas are gaining more social, political, and economic rights. The various affluent Chicana intellectuals and authors are testimonies to this post-ethnic and hopefully post-gender Chicana struggle. The Chicana struggle has developed over time, changing its ideological positions and the focus of Chicana narratives from a more radical position, that was perhaps obsessively focused on negative themes of victimization, to a more self-assured, albeit conservative, stance in which Chicana characters are more positive culturally and more integrated into North American society. For such a long period of time, North American society was perceived as a marginalizing machine towards Latino/as. Today, a more confident stance may cause Chicanas to feel less alienated in matters of class, race, and gender than earlier times. Chicanas have overcome negative social injustices and have made a positive cultural middle class contribution.

My thesis will examine the different aspects of class, race, and gender which have evolved significantly throughout time. I will examine the chronology of Chicano/a literature from the 1970's to the present 20<sup>th</sup> century. Although I mention many Chicano/a authors and their respective literature throughout the length of the paper, I will primarily focus on analyzing a few key works as representative of each particular phase. The Chicano/a literature which I analyze is fiction and therefore imagines worlds that yield insight into social reality. Chicana authors, such as Sandra Cisneros, Pat Mora, Michele Serros, Ana Castillo, Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga, Norma Cantú, Lorna Dee Cervantes, and Gina Valdés have chosen to represent the Chicano community as well as the individual Chicana experience. This literature responds to a history of racial



and gender inequality including ethnocentric values and negative stereotypes imposed by American society.

The four literary “waves” mentioned in the Thesis, characterize the turning points in Chicano social experiences. The changes between each literary wave shift attention from one set of themes to another. Each subsequent literary wave improves on the previous wave. For example, the first wave centers on working class experiences, while the second wave concentrates on gender issues. The first literary advancement deals primarily with social, political, and class issues concerning Chicanos. The first literary wave flourished around the Chicano Movement during the 1960’s. The Chicano Movement works for Chicano labor rights and fights racial discrimination. The first wave is a sort of introduction to the second literary wave. The second literary development, begins in the 1980’s, and focuses on issues of identity specifically regarding gender, rather than the “macho” social, racial and ethnic politics of the 1960’s. Chicana authors present gender as a missing element of the Chicano Movement of the 1960’s. The second wave is the focus of the Thesis, as Chicana literature and gender politics grew during this time period. The third wave discusses the new mestiza and the importance of cooperation among all the peoples of America, as communicated by Gloria Anzaldúa. Anzaldúa was a forerunner for her time because she was already thinking about issues of bi-culturalism and even post-racialism. Finally, the fourth wave represents a growing middle class that feels more comfortable than oppressed by the triple bind previously mentioned. The fourth literary movement exemplifies hope for an end to classism, racism, and sexism. Of course each literary wave touches on issues of race, class, and gender, since these subjects of concern have not fully disappeared

however, the fourth wave also includes a kind of post-racial culture that infers the end of racial discrimination. The fourth wave suggests a bi-cultural America in which we are all mixed, mestizo, and bi-cultural if not multi-cultural. The culminations of the four literary movements only begin to describe the complexity of the Chicano/a culture, social-economics, history, identity, race, gender, and ethnicity.

Chicano/as of the working class must deal with oppression imposed by the wealthy class. Chicano/a critics and writers write from the perspective of the working class. In this way, Chicano/a literature empowers the working class rather than the upper-income class. For example, in the fictional story of Luis Valdez, the characters are underrepresented in the American workforce. Many statistics show that “although Latinos have a strong work ethic, they come into the labor market at a distinct disadvantage...Latinos are also limited by employment discrimination, occupational segregation, overrepresentation in less secure forms of employment, and heightened vulnerability to structural economic shifts.

In addition to class struggles, Chicano/as must deal with racial stereotypes and a long history of racial discrimination. Many traditional Chicano parents would prefer to bring white children into the world because unfortunately, in many cases, race determines the way one is treated in the United States. Sadly, “Chicanos as a subordinated minority group in the United States historically have been denied political power and relegated to inferior jobs relative to the white population.”<sup>10</sup> This racial hierarchy has been exemplified time and time again. “Although class and race bestow and/or limit access to

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<sup>10</sup> Denise Segura, “Chicanas and Triple Oppression in the Labor Force”, in Chicana Voices: Intersections of Class, Race, and Gender, 47.

political and economic power, women within each class category and racial/ethnic group are subordinate relative to men.”<sup>11</sup>

Lastly, Gender oppression is unique from race and class oppression in that all men dominate women, rather than solely a few white men dominating race or class. In other words, gender oppressors consist of a larger group, and therefore are more widely accepted within society. Gender discrimination is less of a concern in our society today because no one questions society. Most everyone assumes that women are being treated fairly compared to past circumstances. The truth is that women are not treated fairly because women are still unequal to men, although great strides have been made towards gender equality. Social roles have brainwashed people into thinking that it is reasonable for women to remain second best to men. In reality though, women are not inferior to men, but rather patriarchal society wants us to believe women are inferior to men. Within our culture, sexism, is often overlooked. Therefore, gender oppression is more likely to occur within the home than any other kind of oppression. Often times, fathers hope that their daughters would marry and settle down with children, excluding the possibility that their daughters could succeed at both career and family. According to Denise Segura;

Triple oppression, then, refers to the interplay among class, race, and gender, whose cumulative effects place all [Chicanas] in a subordinate social and economic position relative to men of color and the majority of the white population. The significance of this concept for Chicanas lies in the recognition of their limited options compared to white men and women as well as minority men. Their [“inferior status”] is reproduced concurrently in the home and in all other social arenas.

At first glance, the overwhelming odds between issues of race, class, and gender, may make it seem as though Chicanas are in a position without opportunity. Fortunately

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<sup>11</sup> Segura, 48.

though, as society progresses, Chicanas have gained more rights and privileges. Thus, Chicano/a literature begins with extreme cases of gender, racial, and class oppression, and ends with examples of Chicanas surpassing all forms of oppression. The first two literary waves give examples of class, racial, and gender oppression, while the third and fourth literary waves give hope towards a bi-cultural and post-ethnic society. In the second wave, the character of Esperanza, for example, faces class, racial, and gender oppression. The story ends without telling the reader whether Esperanza (“hope” in Spanish) finds her fairy-tale ending. On the contrary, in the fourth literary wave, Ana Castillo states that “Women are not Roses”. She makes this point clear because she wants to erase all of the previous objects (such as roses) which women have been compared to throughout time. Castillo wants to put an end to fairy-tale stories and show the true identity of women. Many Chicano/a authors have told their experiences of racism, classism, and sexism as a literature opposed to the mainstream culture and media. Consequently, Chicana literature describes the reality of life as a Mexican-American woman of working class in the United States. The Chicana describes the complexity of a triple bind, which refers to three main wires (class, race, and gender) that entrap a Chicana in a cage of oppression. These three oppressions are recurring in Chicana literature because many Chicanas of low income status can relate to these barriers/wires. Chicana literature gives Chicanas hope towards a better standard of living and shows them the possibility of freedom. In other cases, Chicana literature is an example of the success which Chicanas have obtained. Chicana literature, community, and university setting represent a “feminist space of independence where second-generation women can (re)invent themselves, although not without conflict and ambiguity.”<sup>12</sup> Chicana literature

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<sup>12</sup> Alma García, “Confronting and Contesting Patriarchal Constraints”, in Narratives of Mexican American

motivates Chicana readers to break free from the cage that has trapped them for so long. As Paula Gunn Allen defines literature in the sense that “a work does not become literature because it is published. If that were true, a cigarette pack would be literature. A work is defined as literature when it is primarily aesthetic in significance, because it conveys a particular confluence of meanings in ways that are particular to literary discourse.”<sup>13</sup> Distinguishing characteristics of a literary work include: “the imagination, the community experience, the major emotions, the aesthetics of personal experience that give it communal significance, that render the personal in ways that make it part of the universal.”<sup>14</sup> Chicana literatures successfully embrace and clarify these literary characteristics since Chicana politics including emotions, personal experiences, and communal significance, are the vital elements of Chicana literature.

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Women, 115.

<sup>13</sup> Paula Gunn Allen, Spiderwoman's granddaughters, 7.

<sup>14</sup> Allen, 7-8.

## PART ONE

### **First literary wave: Representational Prominence of Social class, Social Justice, and Ethnicity during the Height of the Chicano Movement**

#### **1.1- Luis Valdez's *Actos del Teatro Campesino* in conjunction with the victimized lower class Chicanos**

One point worth discussing before delving into Chicano/a literature is the loaded term “Mexican-American”. This term, given to Chicanos by Anglo Saxons, suggests a certain kind of ambiguity and complication. This name does not coin a Chicano as fully Mexican or fully American. The term Mexican-American is offensive to those who do not view themselves as Americans.

On the contrary, “Chicano” is a relatively recent term that has been used by many Mexican descendants as reflective of their distinctive culture. At first, the term “Chicano” was derogatory, but was later transformed by Mexican-American activists. “Chicano/a” is now used by political activists, scholars, and other Mexican-Americans interested in redefining their identity from mainstream culture.

Chicanos could be considered “half and half” or “half breeds” because they are not fully American nor fully Mexican. Leanne Howe begins to describe the life of “half breeds”:

Half breeds live on the edge of both races. You feel like you're split down the middle. Your right arm wants to unbutton your shirt while your left arm is trying to keep your shirt on. You're torn between wanting to kill everyone in the room, o buying 'em all another round of drinks...Our erratic behavior is often explained

away by friends and family as ‘trying to be’. If you’re around [Mexicans], you’re trying to be white. If you’re around [white people], you’re trying to be [brown].<sup>15</sup>

Family, friends, and strangers assume Chicanos have assimilated to “the other culture” (American culture) rather than “nuestra cultura” or “our culture” (Mexican culture).

These types of assumptions and accusations can be harmful to a Chicano’s identity. A “half-breed” says: “Sometimes I feel like the blood in my veins is a deadly mixture of [Rh] positive and [Rh] negative and every cell in my body is on a slow nuclear melt-down.”<sup>16</sup>

The blend of Spanish and Indian races has an important historical significance that is distinguishable from any other culture. The two cultures clashed from the first moment they were in contact until today. The “cosmic race” which José Vasconcelos mentions as the Mexican race is special. The extraordinary nature of the “cosmic race” will be explained in further detail in the third section of the Thesis. Chicano mestizaje is not only a mix of Spanish and indigenous peoples, but also a mix of North American and Mexican cultures. The exploitation of indigenous peoples during “la conquista” permeated to North America with the exploitation of first and second generation Mexicans in the United States. Unfortunately, the social and cultural traits from colonialism are still implanted in our society today.

The first literary movement addresses issues of worker’s rights and negative ethnic stereotypes of Mexicans in mass media. Luis Valdez especially addresses both of these issues. This literary paradigm was and still is important in terms of racial discrimination in the United States. The time period of the first literary wave highly encouraged a social reform because race was closely tied to economic status. Latinos

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<sup>15</sup> LeAnne Howe, “An American in New York,” in *Spiderwoman’s Grandaughters*, 254-255.

<sup>16</sup> Howe, 255.

living in the United States, in general, are limited by lower socioeconomic backgrounds, language issues, low education levels, employment discrimination, occupational segregation, overrepresentation in less secure forms of employment, and heightened vulnerability to structural economic shifts.<sup>17</sup>

The Chicano movement served to address the social and economic inequalities of Chicanos in American society. Oppressed groups like the Chicano farm workers of California were protesting for better wages and working conditions. During this time, there was an influx of Mexican-American literature that expressed the hardships of these Chicanos. Luis Valdez sparked a lot of controversy during this time period, as he fought for the farmers rights in California. Luis Valdez became a play writer who wrote many satirical plays such as “Los Vendidos” as a social protest against the government concerning the unfair treatment of Chicanos. Valdez supported Chicano strikes and marches, while using the theatre to attract attention towards the farmer’s unions and other beneficial organizations. The Mexican-American role in “Los Vendidos” represents a Chicano who has lost or sold his identity. In the end, he does not feel like a Mexican or an American. Using humor, Luis Valdez tries to convince his audience to respect the working class no matter what color they are. Valdez creates a politically controversial theatre, and therefore counteracts the negative stereotypes created by dominant media. Valdez helped to shape the “discourse of Chicano ethnic consciousness.”<sup>18</sup> For instance, in “Los Vendidos,” Luis Valdez compares Chicanos to robots in order to illustrate how Chicanos are portrayed in the United States. This Chicano uproar turned into a desire for political reform. Furthermore, literary projects by authors such as Luis Valdez were

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<sup>17</sup> Chon Noriega, CSRC Research Report, November 2007, 2-6.

<sup>18</sup> Mermann- Jozwiak, 2.



driven by the need for an affirmation of identity, an emphasis on collective consciousness, a desire for self-determination, and a need to validate the history of the Chicano experience. Chicanos were able to relate to the experiences described in the play, creating a collective realization. These collective realizations eventually lead to change in the political arena. The Chicano fight is still on-going today and did not end with the Chicano Movement of the 70's.

In the play "Los Vendidos" ("the sell-outs"), Luis Valdez portrays the Mexican characters as robots that serve the government and capitalist economy of the United States. The businessman named *Honest Sancho* sells the Mexican workers to the big corporations of the United States for cheap labor. Included, the president's Mexican secretary named *Miss JIM-enez* buys the robot from *Honest Sancho*. *Honest Sancho* shows *Miss JIM-enez* the qualities of each robot in hopes to persuade her to buy one of his models. *Honest Sancho* will go to any lengths to sell his product. He fully takes advantage of his own people, leaving them without any civil liberties. As the story unfolds, the robots do not see a way out of their economic situation. The robots are used and abused by American society. Valdez communicates the abusive nature of the government towards Chicanos by referring to robots and Chicanos in the same way. It is clear that Valdez believes Chicanos are perceived as machines rather than human beings according to the United States government and American society. Unfortunately, by the end of the play the "sell-outs" remain robots. This is an indicator to Chicanos that assimilating to American culture is not the answer. In the play, each character ends up with a more difficult job and life due to assimilation. For the Mexican-American, assimilation meant he had to give up all that is Mexican. He states; "I come before you

as a Mexican-American to tell you about the problems of the Mexican. The problems of the Mexican stem from one thing and one thing only: he's stupid. He's uneducated. He needs to stay in school. He needs to be ambitious, forward-looking, harder-working. He needs to think American, American, American! God Bless America!" The Mexican-American becomes the exact image of what Americans want him to be. By the end of the play, the Mexican-American can no longer assimilate, and starts to break down. The robot starts to go crazy as if all of his wires get tangled. He is no longer able to define himself as a Mexican-American, but rather he sees himself as a Chicano. He yells "Chicano power!" because as a type of resistance against the *Secretary*. As a result, Chicanos are known for their culture of resistance. In reality, many Chicanos must tolerate the injustices committed onto them by American corporations. The "sell-outs" try to move up the social-economic ladder by fitting the mold of the "Mexican type for the administration."<sup>19</sup> For the robots, assimilation seems to be the only path to economic success. The "sell-outs" comply with the American system of exploitation, rather than fight it. All of these "robot types" at *Honest Sancho's* store are underpaid and experience unfair working conditions. In the end, *Miss JIM-enez* asks the "assimilated" *Mexican-American* to give up his Mexican heritage completely just as she has. *Miss JIM-enez* profited from her acculturation and assimilation into the American system. Although all of the characters in the play are considered to be sell-outs, *Miss JIM-enez* is especially noted as the principal sell-out. *Miss JIM-enez* is the classic example of the female "traitor" or "sell-out", a representation of someone Chicanos detest. Valdez represents her in this way because he is referring to the stereotype of La Malinche. La Malinche was an indigenous woman who helped Cortez (Spanish conqueror) conquer "Mexico".

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<sup>19</sup> Luis Valdez, "Los Vendidos," 41.

Even Mexican women have bought into the misrepresentation of La Malinche's "betrayal" and are convinced that La Malinche betrayed "her people." This is not true because La Malinche was not a Mexican. In addition, Mexico did not exist at that time. What is now considered Mexico was composed of many indigenous tribes before and during the conquest.

*Miss JIM-enez* is what many Mexicans refer to as "malanchista" or "traitor". The term "malanchista" derives from La Malinche who was an interpreter for Hernán Cortez during the conquest of Mexico. Cortez was the leader of the Spanish conquerors. The Spanish conquered the Indians because they considered themselves the dominant. Similarly, the president of the United States is considered the leader of the dominant race, class, and gender. La Malinche and *Miss JIM-enez* are portrayed as sell-outs although they are making the best of the situation they are put in. La Malinche found a way out of her nomadic lifestyle with the help of Cortez. Similarly, *Miss JIM-enez* found a way to move up the social-economic ladder with the help of the president. According to Mexican histories, La Malinche is compared to the Mexican Eve. In the book of Genesis, Eve ate the apple and committed the first sin. Thus, male dominance comes from machismo, while malinchismo represents female betrayal and conquest. Therefore, the woman is seen as weak and guilty of the great fall of mankind. La Malinche helped Cortez and the Spanish soldiers conquer Mexico by giving them important information. Her actions were seen as a sign of disloyalty to her "culture". As it can be argued, this supposed "disloyalty" to her "culture" was not a just accusation.

At the time, Mexico was split into many different indigenous tribes. Mexico did not share one collective culture as it does today. Thus, it is difficult to say that La

Malinche was a traitor to this “Mexican culture” that did not exist. La Malinche moved from one tribe to the next, one culture to the next, and learned one language after another. For that reason, she did not have a strong sense of loyalty to any particular tribe. She was sold into slavery and finally offered as a gift to Cortez. La Malinche was converted to Christianity, and thereafter she was shown respect from the Spanish soldiers, especially from Cortez.<sup>20</sup> They called her Doña Marina because in Spain “Doña” refers to someone of admiration and authority. The Spanish title “Doña” has similar traits of esteem as the English title “Miss”. *Miss JIM-enez* does not consider herself a Chicana as *Honest Sancho* describes her; “Ah, una chicana! Welcome, welcome Señorita Jiménez.”<sup>21</sup> *Miss JIM-enez* quiere que *Honest Sancho* pronuncie su nombre en la manera Anglo; “My name is Miss JIM-enez. Don’t you speak English? What’s wrong with you?”<sup>22</sup> She thinks that since *Honest Sancho* does not pronounce her name “correctly” there is something wrong with him. Luis Valdez highlighted *Miss JIM-enez* as the most ridiculed antagonist in his play. Chicanas are castigated for breaking with socially prescribed female norms. They are displaced and disowned, cast over to “el otro lado” just like *Miss JIM-enez*.

Luis Valdez chose the characters names of his play carefully. *Honest Sancho* ironically earned his name by his not so honest nature. *Honest Sancho* goes to any lengths to sell his robots. Just like any “honest” businessman *Honest Sancho* is sly in his dealings. *Miss JIM-enez*’s name is especially interesting because of the hyphen that separates her name just as the *Mexican-American*. The hyphen emphasizes their

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<sup>20</sup> All of this information on La Malinche came from a Spanish 330 class I took at Ohio State. More information on La Malinche can be found from this resource: Romero, Rolanda and Amanda Nolacea Harris, *Feminism, Nation, and Myth: La Malinche*, Houston, Tex.: Arte Público Press, 2005.

<sup>21</sup> Valdez, 41.

<sup>22</sup> Valdez, 41.

bicultural nature, as both of these characters overlap both cultures. Miss JIM-enez is primarily identified as Anglo, evident to her name which is dominantly Anglo besides the very last bit “enez”. This last bit is barely clinging on to her identity. It seems as though she would erase the “mexicanidad” from her name if she could. By changing her Mexican name to the Anglo pronunciation, *Miss JIM-enez* is changing her birthright and cultural identity. One must question *Miss JIM-enez*’s loyalty to her country of origin. This use of her name in the Anglo form adds to the criticism of her “malanchista” nature. Apparently she did not feel a strong bond towards her Mexican side. Another character named *Johnny Pachuco* was portrayed as a city gangster, therefore satirizing the close association between the Pachuco subculture and the gangster subculture. In reality, Pachucos were only young Chicanos, but the dominant Anglo culture labeled them as gang members. Names are our primary identifier in our lives. The *Farmworker* robot represented the arduous farmers of California whom Valdez defended, as the son of migrant farm workers. Seasonal work, low pay, and harsh field conditions were some of the issues mentioned in the play, which discussed the exploitation of Chicano farm workers. The *Revolucionario* was the character which encompassed the media’s idea of a revolutionary, prideful, and romantic Chicano stereotype. The *Revolucionario* is defined as an early California bandit type similar to Robin Hood’s character. Lastly, the *Mexican-American* proves to be the most American of all the robots. *Miss Jimenez* finds the first few models unsuitable, as the *Farmworker* is unpolished, the *Revolutionary* is unable to speak English, and the *Pachuco* is a delinquent. The three types are all socially and linguistically portrayed as the stereotypical Mexican. Because of these stereotypes, *Miss JIM-enez* does not accept them. She would rather buy a model that is more like her

self. Her requirements are met by the *Mexican-American* model whose linguistic and social assimilation she judges to be appropriate for a role in state government. The *Mexican-American* earned his hyphenated name from Anglo culture. The *Mexican-American* and *Miss JIM-enez* have hyphenated names because they are the most Americanized of all the characters. Therefore, the *Mexican-American* and *Miss JIM-enez* have an extremely split identity between Mexican and American. *Miss JIM-enez* did not change her name with the sole intention of fitting into Anglo culture. This is apparent when she corrects *Honest Sancho* of the appropriate pronunciation of her name. If she changed her name for the sole reason of fitting into Anglo culture, there would be no reason to ask non-Anglos to use the name change. *Miss JIM-enez* has changed her name completely just as she has changed her identity completely. She no longer associates herself with Chicanos, but rather names herself Anglo. Names are an important part of our identity, since we use them to identify ourselves to other people. In the case of Clearly, *Miss JIM-enez* wants this Anglo name because she does not identify with her Mexican identity. On the same note, La Malinche did not identify with the Mexican culture (which did not exist at the time) nor did she necessarily identify with the many indigenous tribes that sold her into slavery. Luis Valdez uses the role of *Miss JIM-enez* in this play as the stereotypical “bad woman” who sells out her country of origin when in reality these characters do not have a strong sense of identity with their country of origin.

The traditional Mexican family was, and still is in many cases based upon the “caring mother” and the “macho father”. Any type of women’s movement that challenged the construction of patriarchal family was frowned upon. Not surprisingly then, Luis Valdez most likely intentionally portrayed *Miss JIM-enez* as a Malinche

because she deviated from the normal role of the Mexican mother. *Miss JIM-enez* betrayed her own people to work for the government of the United States. She was considered a traitor of her ethnicity to find this type of work with the U.S. government. It was especially difficult for Chicanos to accept *Miss JIM-enez's* job position. Chicano literature of this era was biased and worked against the Chicana's success and happiness. Although Chicano literature works to end classism and racism, Chicano politics and literature does not address one of the most important issues of gender.

During the time of the Chicano movement Chicanas were not represented in Chicano politics or in Chicano literature. In some cases, they were represented negatively in Chicano literature. The example of Miss JIM-enez is a prime example of how Chicanas are represented in Chicano literature. The issue of gender has been excluded from Chicano literature and politics.

## **1.2- The role of racial and gender stereotypes within Luis Valdez's plays and films, World War II propaganda, and Hollywood**

The most celebrated Chicano "crossover" success story written by Luis Valdez is the film *La Bamba*, which has become a major hit in the United States and Latin America. In many ways literature and film (in this case) will dialogue with the past. The early work of Luis Valdez consisted of the Teatro Campesino, and the play "Los Vendidos" which examines stereotypes of Chicanos in California and how Chicanos are

treated by local, state, and federal governments. The Teatro Campesino evolved as Luis Valdez went to Hollywood and later to Broadway. El Teatro Campesino no longer commits itself to specific cultural and social ideals, but rather is committed to mainstreaming—a process Luis Valdez calls a “narcotic injection: I see it as mainlining into the veins of America.”<sup>23</sup> His goal is to create a Chicano culture with mass appeal: “The real challenge is to conquer the hearts of those unsympathetic millions of Americans who are perhaps unfamiliar with what we represent as a people or cause.”<sup>24</sup> An analysis of Luis Valdez’s modern work “Los Corridos” reveals a shift in audience away from the Chicano community towards the unsympathetic white audience.

Even in “Los Corridos”, written by Luis Valdez, the narrator emphasizes the macho point of view. The images of men and women in “Los Corridos” represent a retrograde of Mexican tradition. As a result, “Los Corridos” create images of; women for sale, women as passive victims, and women as drunkard mothers. As previously mentioned, Luis Valdez portrays women as “malanchistas” in his play “Los Vendidos” through the characterization of *Miss JIM-enez*. Another production envisioned by Luis Valdez called “Soldadera”, attempts to “do justice to the true role of women in Mexican history.”<sup>25</sup> In this segment, the woman is a disempowered spectacle in which no female testimonial source concerning the Mexican Revolution can be found. Instead, the “true role of Mexican women in history”<sup>26</sup> is narrated through a white male character: John Reed. John Reed is the least promising narrator that Luis Valdez could have chosen to describe the role of Mexican women throughout history. Reeds manner stands in strong

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<sup>23</sup> Yolanda Broyles-González, “What Price ‘Mainstream?’”, In The Chicano/a Cultural Studies Reader, 271.

<sup>24</sup> Broyles-González, 271.

<sup>25</sup> Broyles-González, 273.

<sup>26</sup> Broyles-González, 273.



contrast to that of the three soldaderas and the Mexican men, whose verbal exchanges are almost exclusively aggressive and/or abusive. Mexican women's contribution to the narrative line consists entirely of discussions concerning the finding and losing of men, about following men, about holding on to men. These women are only portrayed as men's little helpers/elves. For example, La Rielera (the railroad woman) engages in only two activities: sleeping with her man and making tortillas. According to Yolanda Broyles-González, "Women simply make the tortillas for those who make history."<sup>27</sup> The three corridos (songs) chosen at end focus on women in terms of endearment, thus leaving out women's role in the Revolution. In conclusion, "the woman's true song remains unsung."<sup>28</sup>

Additionally, the female characters in the corridos constantly appear as mere sex objects, therefore denying women of any speaking roles. Into the bargain, "they function only as passive objects and as satellites revolving around men's orbit. The Corridos' construction of Mexican women plays directly into the long history of stereotyping made in Hollywood."<sup>29</sup> As this analysis unfolds, we will see Hollywood linked to a history and everlasting pattern of negative female stereotypes.

Luis Valdez does nothing to honor Mexican women, but rather perpetuates negative stereotypes concerning the roles of Mexican women. In "Los Vendidos", Valdez criticizes negative stereotypes in relation to the role of Mexican workers in the United States. As a media figure of the Chicano Movement, Valdez often lectures about El Teatro Campesino, media representations of Mexicans and Chicanos, and the

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<sup>27</sup> Broyles-González, 273.

<sup>28</sup> Broyles-González, 274.

<sup>29</sup> Broyles-González, 274.

importance of Chicano-produced media in order to help counter negative ethnic stereotypes. Therefore, it is somewhat reasonable that his focus is on Chicano rights as opposed to Chicana rights. Why does there have to be a separation of Chicano rights and Chicana rights? Aren't we all fighting for the same thing? Why can't Chicanos help the Chicana struggle? Why are Chicanas detached from the Chicano Movement? On the other hand, is it possible to assume that Luis Valdez "pokes fun" at racial stereotypes in the same way as gender stereotypes. In other words, does Luis Valdez purposely portray women as men's helpers just as he represents the Mexican-American robots as Anglo's helpers?

More importantly than Luis Valdez's outlook on race and gender, is society's examination of race and gender. Since race is a social construct, rather than a biological reality, society defines the meaning of race. Society has connected the meaning of race to a person's skin color. The racial construction of Chicanos is dominantly negative, especially where mass media depicts Chicanos as the dirty greaser; the treacherous bandido/criminal; the happy-go-lucky lover of song, food, and dance; and the tragic, silent, dark, handsome 'Spanish' type of romantic film. Luis Valdez incorporates these stereotypical characters in his play called "Los Vendidos". In an attempt to sell the "farm worker model", the storeowner describes ways in which the U.S. government can exploit the farm worker: "During those hot sluggish days in the field when vines or the branches get so entangled, it's almost impossible to move, these holes [on his arms] emit a certain grease that allows our model to slip and slide right through the crop with no trouble at all".<sup>30</sup> Then the buyer asks if the farm worker is economical. The storeowner named Honest Sancho replies; "Economical? Senorita, you are looking at the Volkswagen of

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<sup>30</sup> Valdez, 42.

Mexicans. Pennies a day is all it takes. One plate of beans and tortillas will keep him going all day.”<sup>31</sup> The criminal stereotype is depicted with a “feature no city model can be without. He gets arrested, but not without resisting, of course.”<sup>32</sup>

As stereotypes became more prominent, the gap between Chicanos and Americans grew larger. Each time an Anglo would try to form an interpersonal relationship with a Mexican-American, their preconceived stereotype would get in the way. Thus, stereotyping “denies members of both groups the opportunity to interact with each other on anything like a complex, nuanced human level.”<sup>33</sup> The World War II propaganda “conducted during the repatriation reinforced in the minds of many Anglos the stereotype that Mexican Americans were aliens.”<sup>34</sup> As a result, whites took higher paying jobs, while Mexicans undertook their place in heavy industry. In addition, Mexicans occupied the oldest housing stock; segregation was common; and many recreational facilities excluded Mexican Americans. In this segregated environment, gangs arose, and along with it stereotypes of “Mexican hoodlums” such as el pachuco. Although the news and media have become less “racist” and more politically correct, racial stereotypes and more specifically Latino stereotypes continue to emerge in the media today.

The boundaries to the racial ghettos added to the racial segregation. According to Frye, “the boundaries of a racial ghetto in an American city serve to some extent to keep white people from going in, as well as to keep ghetto dwellers from going out.”<sup>35</sup> The

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<sup>31</sup> Valdez, 42.

<sup>32</sup> Valdez, 44.

<sup>33</sup> Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, “Racial Depiction in American Law and Culture,” in The Latino/a Condition, 207.

<sup>34</sup> Rodolfo Acuña, “Zoot Suits, Sleepy Lagoon, and the Road to Delano,” In Early Chicano Activism, 309.

<sup>35</sup> Frye, 32.

barrier limits the activities on both sides. Even so, it must be known that this barrier is for the benefit of whites, as members of the dominant and privileged group. Sandra Cisneros describes her experience with this racial discrimination in her own neighborhood; “Those who don’t know any better come into our neighborhood scared. They think we’re dangerous. They think we will attack them with shiny knives. They are stupid people who are lost and got here by mistake. All brown all around, we are safe. But watch us drive into a neighborhood of another color and our knees go shakity-shake and our car windows get rolled up tight and our eyes look straight.”<sup>36</sup> Cisneros uses a child narrator to imply that we are taught to think about race by society’s standards/geographic racial ghettos. The child points out the flaw in society which most adults would either never notice or never dare to mention in fear of deviation from the norm. Once society realizes the non-existence of race, racial stereotypes will start to fade out and gender stereotypes become a more recent issue.

Although many Chicano authors, such as Luis Valdez, ignore the Chicana struggle, Chicana writers have continued to insert themselves into a Chicano history that has excluded them despite Chicana effort. Testimonies, ethnic autobiographies, and cultural autobiographies are all genres which these women have used to describe their histories and memories. For all intents and purposes, Chicana histories and memories have a vital connection to the Chicana present. Norma Klahn stresses the significant social themes in Chicana literature: “The genre, in the case of Chicanas, possesses ideological power; it serves [many functions] because the speaking subject is positioned outside the dominant symbolic order.”<sup>37</sup> In other terms, Norma Klahn points out that

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<sup>36</sup> Sandra Cisneros, “Those Who Don’t”, In House on Mango Street, 28.

<sup>37</sup> Norma Klahn, “Literary (Re)Mappings,” Chicana Feminisms, 118.

Chicana literature is coming from the viewpoint and perspective of the less dominant group. At first, mainstream literature came from the perspective of the white male. Then Chicano literature emerged with a new perspective. Lastly, this Chicana literature shows the world who Chicanas are from their own perspective rather than from the perspective of the white male or the Chicano. Klahn states that Chicanas are positioned outside of social order, but that their literature helps society relate to them. In the next literary wave we will see many characters who are positioned outside of the social order. Sandra Cisneros' character in House on Mango Street named *Mamacita* is an example of a character who is placed outside of the social order. *Mamacita* is depicted as a Chicana who sits by her window, "forbidden or afraid to enter the world represented by the street, literally and physically trapped in their imposed domesticity."<sup>38</sup> *Mamacita* is placed outside of the social order because of her inability to speak English. She does not know anyone in this new society besides her husband who works all day.

As we make headway into the twenty first century and witness the move of Chicanas from positions of marginality, to positions of power, we need to disassociate Chicanas with negative stereotypes, and rather associate Chicanas with their true identity. Due to multicultural ethnicities and intersectional identities, it is difficult to reveal the Chicana's true identity. Even though, many Chicana writers such as Sandra Cisneros, Pat Mora, Gina Valdés, and Lorna Dee Cervantes, and Cherríe Moraga effectively demonstrate the life of Chicana women via themselves and through invented female characters, these identity constructions cannot represent all Chicanas as a whole. Each Chicana has her own life history, therefore setting her apart from other Chicanas.

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<sup>38</sup> Sandra Cisneros, "No Speak English," The House on Mango Street, 77.

## **PART TWO**

### **Second Wave: Gender Politics from the inside**

Writing in the eighties brought a new wave of writers and switched the focus to address shortcomings from the previous literary production by Chicanos of the sixties. The new focus centered on issues of gender and identity rather than political upheaval per se. Some critics even consider these Chicana writers conservative, offering tales of upward mobility and becoming darlings of the publishing industry. Sandra Cisneros is an example of an author who had her work published by one of the most important American publishing companies based in New York. Sandra Cisneros' characters show a culture of resistance, in which Chicanas face the challenges of society. Cisneros, especially, does justice to the Chicana identity in her book House on Mango Street.

One Anglo solution to the clash of Mexican and American culture is assimilation. For many Chicanos, the assimilationist view is questionable or unsatisfying. This is illustrated by Chicano resistance to unfair business practices towards Chicanos. The Chicano movement was spurred by literary works such as "Los Vendedos that publicized Chicano feelings of discontent. Similarly, many Chicana writers such as Sandra Cisneros and Gloria Anzaldúa write about the unfulfilling nature of assimilation to patriarchal society. As Chicanas face a dilemma of race and gender, they experience a double bind. A double bind occurs when the victim is trapped by two conflicting demands "in which options are reduced and [any leftover options] expose one to penalty, censure or deprivation" (Frye 24). In this case, the oppressor is the white male, while the victim is

the Chicana. For Mexican-American women, all major “wires” that make up their cage are related to social constructs of race and gender. In many Chicana literary works, female characters experience a double bind of being caught between the gender expectations of two cultures, therefore creating alienation and identity crisis. Being a minority and a woman is like being between a rock and a hard place. Chicanas are in danger of losing their own identity amid the two cultures. Such a confusion of place and time can truly harm a person. Most humans have trouble living in one place at a time, not to mention two places at a time. Through writing about their struggles and successes, many Chicana writers have defined their identity, which was once confusing, but now clear. In this literary movement, Chicana writers explain their own experiences based on their gender, race, and social class.

Cultures use myths and stories of heroines and heroes to create role models and distinguish “correct behavior from incorrect, transmit moral values, and identify those traits considered desirable by a group or society.”<sup>39</sup> In today’s popular culture (created by the media) youngsters and teenagers perceive pop-stars as icons, idols, and role models. These icons can often be false or misleading for young women. Women’s lives are particularly restricted by cultural values and norms that try to dictate how women should act and who their role models should be. Therefore, many Chicana writers have chosen to re-define and re-invent heroines from a non-traditional/non-patriarchal to a more matriarchal archetype.

The primary example of the traditional heroine is the Virgin Mary, whom many traditional Mexican and American women regard as the all-encompassing idol. Roman Catholics have always emphasized the importance of the Virgin Mary and the tradition to

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<sup>39</sup> Diana Rebolledo, Women Singing in the Snow, 49.

“emulate her self-abnegation, purity, care of her physical as well as spiritual child(ren), and passivity.”<sup>40</sup> She is a helper to all those in need, all the while living free from sin. In Mexico, the Virgin of Guadalupe, the first mestiza Virgin, appeared to Juan Diego in a place of sacred worship to the goddess, Tonantzin. “This appropriation of an already-sacred space facilitated the native Mexicans’ acceptance of the Indian/Mestiza [Virgin]. Moreover, the Virgin of Guadalupe represents the merging of European and Indian culture since she is, in some senses, a transformation or ‘rebirth’ of the native goddesses”. Additionally, she was an important symbol of syncretism, which is the attempt to merge contradictory beliefs (the mixing of traditions in mythology and religion). For example, syncretism used Tonantzin from the Indian culture and the Christian Virgin from the Spanish culture to create the new mestiza through the Virgin of Guadalupe. The Virgin of Guadalupe helped make Christianity relevant to Mexican culture. La Virgen de Guadalupe was created through resistance to Anglo culture. The same “culture of resistance” is carried out in Chicana culture in the United States. Chicanas are not willing to let go of their Mexican heritage without a fight. Ironically, the Virgin of Guadalupe as a symbol of cultural resistance is the very same idol that denies Chicana success in patriarchal society. In order to follow in the footsteps of the Virgin of Guadalupe, a Chicana must be passive, rather than resistant. This traditional patriarchal construction of female identity as symbolized by the Virgin is limited. Therefore, Chicana writers have redefined the Virgin of Guadalupe to her Indian origin, Coatlicue.

Unlike the Virgin of Guadalupe, Coatlicue is a complex goddess and monster, both loving and threatening. Tonantzin is a part of the great Nahuatl goddess Coatlicue,

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<sup>40</sup> Rebolledo, 49.



“the strangest goddess of pre-Spanish America...The metaphysical conceptions of death and resurrection which came together in her as the ‘filth eater’ belongs to the oldest ideas of mankind.”<sup>41</sup> Coatlicue as an ever changing figure is the opposing image of the constant passive Virgin of Guadalupe. Coatlicue is a wise woman who learns from her experience. She advises to “be aware of offers to make you famous; retain control of your own publicity; protect your uterus; avoid housework; listen to inside voices and verify they are yours; insist on personal interviews.”<sup>42</sup> When the images of Tonantzín/Coatlicue and the Virgin of Guadalupe were merged, the powerful aspects of Tonantzín were left behind. “The Catholic Church considered such qualities inappropriate for the Virgin, Mother of God, and instead heavily promoted the all-knowing, all-powerful ‘male’ traits of God the Father, a symbol interpreted through ‘traits’ associated with ruling men in a male-oriented society: aggressiveness, competitiveness, desire for absolute power and control, and demand for obedience.”<sup>43</sup> Since traditionally Chicanos are considered to be superior to Chicanas, traditional patriarchal symbols such as the Virgin of Guadalupe remain prominent in popular culture.

Hence, Chicano literature is full of dutiful mothers, wives, daughters, teachers, nurses, and other helpful, nurturing, compassionate figures. The reality is that women should not be defined as mere “accessories” to men, but rather as equals to men. These figures give society the idea that all women should act like these “role-models”. The Virgin of Guadalupe is the primary “role-model” for Chicanas. She is the patron saint of Chicanos and the visual image of contemporary popular culture. In Mexico, the Virgin is

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<sup>41</sup> Rebolledo, 50.

<sup>42</sup> Rebolledo, 52.

<sup>43</sup> Rebolledo, 52.

a popular symbol found ubiquitously: in buses, taxi cabs, shops, and homes. Mexicans hold such a high regard for the Virgin of Guadalupe (the mother of Jesus), while Americans adore idols such as Britney Spears and other scandalous pop stars. Between Britney Spears and the Virgin of Guadalupe, there needs to be an intermediary role model for young women such as Coatlicue. The Virgin alone sends mixed messages about how a young woman should act. For example, it is impossible for a woman to be a virgin and a mother of her husband's children. Moreover, the Virgin does not fight for her people in the United States, but rather advocates acceptance and endurance. There are some stories of individuals punishing the Virgin if she does not perform properly by putting her in a corner. You may ask yourself how such a powerful icon can be put in a corner. This representation of the Virgin reinforces the idea of her passive nature. For feminist Chicana writers, the Virgin can be a symbol of failure because of her submissive nature towards men. This type of role model does not promote the Chicana "culture of resistance".

La Malinche (in Mexican culture) or Eve (for Christians) is the contrasting female figure to the Virgin Mary. "As the Virgin represents the spiritual, nourishing, and positive aspects of women, Eve is the seductress, temptress of man's flesh and sexuality, and incorporates all the power that lies behind passion, energy, desire, and the power of knowledge."<sup>44</sup> Malinche had the ability to translate for Cortez, giving him power and knowledge over the native tribes. Cortez openly states that without the help of La Malinche it would not have been possible to conquer the Americas as swiftly.

La Malinche was the first indigenous woman to speak native languages and Spanish. She translated and opened the means of patriarchal communication. She is a

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<sup>44</sup> Rebolledo, 62.

complex and ambiguous figure for many Chicana writers since she is seen as a both “la chingada” (the violated one) and as an intelligent woman. As Rebolledo so nicely puts; La Malinche helped to explain “complications, multiplications, triple cultures or more [...] In addition to multiple cultural levels, there are multiple language levels and perspectives. The borders, the limits, the center, the margin—all must be understood, and constantly translated. We are all Malinches.”<sup>45</sup> La Malinche created a new culture and race, and therefore has remained a mystery and important icon to both Mexican and Chicano literary critics. The legacy of La Malinche is often experienced by Chicanas who seek approval from American and Mexican patriarchal society. This creates cultural “schizophrenia”<sup>46</sup> for many Chicanas.

Therefore, the experience of cross-cultural identity alienation is perhaps the single most common theme in ethnic women’s writing. Chicana writers see their own destiny and representation as historians, ethnographers, and witnesses. Their role is crucial in the fight for Chicana rights. Using La Malinche as their guide and inspiration, Chicana writers tell their own perspective and experience. La Malinche had a child by Cortés, but when Cortés was ordered to bring his Spanish wife to the New World, Malinche was married off to one of his soldiers. This marriage arrangement has a similar nature to the relationships in “Never Marry a Mexican”. The Anglo named Drew cannot marry a Mexican (according to social norms), so he marries an Anglo woman and uses Clemencia as his Mexican mistress. Similarly, Cortés cannot marry an indigenous woman according to society, so he marries a Spanish woman instead of La Malinche. In “Never Marry a Mexican”, the white man named Drew cheats on his Anglo wife with a Mexican.

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<sup>45</sup> Rebolledo, 125.

<sup>46</sup> Deborah, Madsen, “Sandra Cisneros,” Contemporary Chicana Literature, 112.

Although, he does not love his wife, he is not willing to marry a Mexican. In the narrative, Drew even calls his Mexican mistress (Clemencia) “La Malinche”:

Drew, remember when you used to call me your Malinalli? It was a joke, a private game between us, because you looked like Cortez with that beard of yours. My skin dark against yours. My Malinalli, Malinche, my courtesan, you said [...] Calling me that name in between little gulps of breath and the raw kisses you gave [...] Before daybreak, you’d be gone, same as always, before I would even know it. And it was as if I’d imagined you, only the teeth marks on my belly and nipples proving me wrong.<sup>47</sup>

Similarly, Cortés was unwilling to marry an indigenous woman, although he was able to impregnate her without ever letting her see her son again.

La Malinche was a victim of circumstance. She represents the subordination of the Indian race to the European white race and she symbolizes “la mestizaje” of the two races. “For a long time, in both Mexico and the United States, the Indian roots of Mexican and Chicano culture were denied, and Mexican Americans [and Mexicans] attempted to assimilate into the dominant culture. The resuscitation of La Malinche as part of the process of mestizaje brings her into the forefront as the symbolic mother of a new race.”<sup>48</sup> For Chicana writers, La Malinche was not “conquered” by the Spanish/European male, but instead she was a woman who had made survival choices. She possessed the power of language and political knowledge, which in turn helped her race. It is speculated that if it were not for her diplomacy and intelligence, there would have been more deaths for the Indian tribes of Mexico. As translator and helper La Malinche takes on the characteristics of the Virgin of Guadalupe. In “Marina Virgin”, Lucha Corpi describes Malinche’s conversion to Christianity; “She washed away her sins with holy water, covered her body with a long, thick cloth so no one would know her

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<sup>47</sup> Sandra Cisneros, “Never Marry a Mexican,” Woman Hollering Creek, 74.

<sup>48</sup> Rebolledo, 64.

brown skin had been damned.”<sup>49</sup> Similar to the woman sinner at the feet of Christ who washed his feet with tears, Marina washed away her sins with holy water. This idea of cleansing and renewal is also true for the Nahuatl goddess, Tlazolteotl as she had the ability to forgive sins and did so with the waters. Filth, in the Aztec and Christian world, is symbolic of sin. Tlazolteotl has four phases related to the four phases of the moon. In the third phase, she has the power to cleanse all sin. This ritual of cleansing was not only a magical sanction, but generally occurred only once in a lifetime, marking the transition to old age. Tlazolteotl can change from a “voluptuous seducer to a cleanser of sins.”<sup>50</sup> Even her name is defined by a split between *tlazolli* meaning “garbage waste” and *talzotli* meaning “precious thing.” Correspondingly, La Malinche and the Nahuatl goddess Tlazolteotl were expected to be cleansed from their sin. The cleansing referred to baptism or conversion to Christianity.

As a consequence of the two identities of La Malinche and La Virgen de Guadalupe, Chicanas only see two ways to move forward in the United States. The first way is the malanchista route would signify the loss of Mexican identity and the acquisition of American identity in an attempt to become “Americanized”, or during the time of the conquerors become “Christianized”. This type of transformation would signify disloyalty to Mexico. In “Los Vendidos,” produced by Luis Valdez, *Miss JIMenez* fit the malachista role. She sold out her Mexican heritage and was considered a traitor to Mexicans and Chicanos for this.

The second option would be to follow the Virgin’s route and abide by the “rules” of patriarchal society by marrying a man with money and passively do as he asks. Many

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<sup>49</sup> Rebolledo, 67.

<sup>50</sup> Rebolledo, 50.

Chicana women have chosen this the Virgin of Guadalupe's path due to fear of rejection from Chicano/Mexican society. The traditional gendered roles are so ingrained within society, that it seems ridiculous to even consider another option. The traditional/patriarchal social construction must be broken if women are to ever be equal to men. Women are not intended to be a man's accessory, but rather his equal. Unfortunately though, the statistics show that Anglo men earn more than native-born Latinos and Chicanas earn even less than native born Latinos.

In "No Speak English" by Sandra Cisneros, the narrator describes the character *Mamacita* who accepted the role of the Virgin of Guadalupe. She stayed at home alone each day while her husband went to work. Her husband worked two jobs and saved his money to bring *Mamacita* to the United States because she was alone with the baby boy in Mexico. She did not speak English and did not assimilate with the culture or the society. *Mamacita* never left the house, but rather wallowed in her nostalgia for Mexico; "She sits all day by the window and plays the Spanish radio show and sings all the homesick songs about her country in a voice that sounds like a seagull."<sup>51</sup> She would not even dare think to leave her house and walk along the streets. Her inability to leave the house is due to fear of American society added with the depression she feels in her new environment. As a consequence of her self-pitying, she would feel outside of the community. One Chicana writer describes her anxiety; "Looking inside myself and my experience, looking at my conflicts, engenders anxiety in me. Being a writer feels very much like being a Chicana, [...] coming up against all sorts of walls. [...] Writing] blocks are related to my cultural identity. The painful periods of confusion that I suffer from are

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<sup>51</sup> Cisneros, 76.

symptomatic of a larger creative process: cultural shifts.”<sup>52</sup> *Mamacita* suffers from this “cultural shift”, in which the stress of living with cultural ambiguity complicates *Mamacita*’s life. She does not know what to do in the foreign place where she now lives. It is apparent that *Mamacita* feels out of place, especially since the narrator (a child) seems to be aware of her insecurity. *Mamacita* feels a type of “living under occupied territory.”<sup>53</sup> *Mamacita* is living under her husband’s Chicano patriarchy and under Anglo dominance. She sits by her window like a “jail bird” who wants to be set free. She is depicted as forbidden or scared to enter the world of the unknown. Instead, she resolves by staying in her domesticity by her lonesome. *Mamacita* feels the oppressive effects of her race, gender, and class more than ever in “the land of the ‘detained’”.

Chicana literature comes from the Chicana’s perspective, which allows the reader to identify more closely with the characters. For example, Chicanas may illustrate how private space is Spanish centered in the home, while a shift to public space that is English-centered, may be less comfortable. In “No Speak English”, a Mexican woman comes to the United States without any knowledge of English. The narrator does not understand why her neighbor is unable to leave the house: “Whatever her reasons, whether she is fat, or can’t climb the stairs, or is afraid of English, she won’t come down.”<sup>54</sup> *Mamacita* refuses to leave her house because she does not speak English. Her Mexican husband has brought her to the United States against her will. As a result, she must learn to deal with living under a Chicano and Anglo patriarchy:

To lose one’s sense of self in the effort to satisfy mutually antagonistic sets of cultural values is the danger negotiated by Cisneros’ characters. The image of living under occupation, of living in an occupied territory or even of becoming

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<sup>52</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 95-96.

<sup>53</sup> Madsen, 113.

<sup>54</sup> Sandra Cisneros, “No Speak English,” *The House on Mango Street*, 77.

occupied territory, describes the experience of both a woman under Chicano patriarchy and a Chicana under Anglo dominance. This accounts for Cisneros's use of the image of the window in several of the stories in *The House on Mango Street*. Women are depicted sitting by their windows, forbidden or afraid to enter the world represented by the street, literally and physically trapped in their imposed domesticity.<sup>55</sup>

In "Never Marry a Mexican", Sandra Cisneros depicts a different sense of lost identity. Cisneros describes the life of the Chicana narrator, *Clemencia*. Her mother always gave her advice to; "never marry a Mexican."<sup>56</sup> This piece of advice is ironic because at the end of the story, the narrator is unable to marry her white boyfriend because of the same negative stereotype he holds against Mexican women. Even though *Clemencia* was an intellectual, her white boyfriend classified her as a Mexican "del otro lado":

Never marry a Mexican, my ma said once and always. She said this because of my father. She said this though she was Mexican too. But she was born *here* in the U.S., and he was born *there*, and it's *not* the same you know [...] Having had to put up with all the grief a Mexican family can put on a girl because she was from *el otro lado*, the other side, and my father had married down by marrying her. If he had married a white woman from *el otro lado*, that would've been different. That would've been marrying up, even if the white girl was poor. But what could be more ridiculous than a Mexican girl who couldn't even speak Spanish, who didn't know enough to set a separate plate for each course at dinner, nor how to fold cloth napkins, nor how to set the silverware.<sup>57</sup>

The narrator defines social class through race rather than socio-economic status.

*Clemencia's* grandparents did not treat their daughter-in-law (*Clemencia's* mother) well because according to *Clemencia's* grandparents, *Clemencia's* mother was not raised properly with the values and traditions of Mexican femininity. Mexican femininity asks the wife to take care of the house and the children, so her husband can "win the bread".

*Clemencia's* mother was not the typical Mexican housewife, nor was she a rich Anglo

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<sup>55</sup> Madsen, 113.

<sup>56</sup> Cisneros, 68.

<sup>57</sup> Cisneros, 69-70.



woman. Clemencia's grandparents racial and gender stereotypes caused them to reject Clemencia's mother did for not fitting to the specific gender and racial expectations which society ultimately imposed. Accordingly, in the eyes of the grandparents, she was worth nothing and had nothing to offer their son. Her mother's advice backfired from "nunca te cases con un mexicano" to "nunca te cases con una mexicana". Clemencia's white boyfriend was also led to believe the negative stereotype: "Never marry a Mexican" o "nunca te cases con una mexicana". Drew takes the advice of Clemencia's Mexican mother unknowingly by not marrying Clemencia. Clemencia's mother and Drew see Mexicans in the same negative perspective. Clemencia's mother assumes that all Mexicans are rotten because of her bad experience with her Mexican husband. She facilitates the negative Mexican stereotype, and by doing so hurts her own race, family, and cultural heritage. She does not consider herself a Mexican because she was born in the United States, although her parents are Mexican. In the story she does not identify herself as a Chicana nor as a part of any particular social class. Clemencia's mother tries to lose her Mexican background because she wants to find a better life than the life that her husband offered her. During the process, Clemencia's mother abandons her daughter; "Once Daddy was gone, it was like my ma didn't exist, like if she died too. When she married that white man, and he and his boys moved into my father's house, it was as if she stopped being my mother. Like I never even had one".<sup>58</sup> The most vivid and lasting memories the narrator has of her mother seem to be connected to her mother's overly repeated phrase "never marry a Mexican", or never make the same mistake your mother did.

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<sup>58</sup> Cisneros, 73.

The mother's uncomfortable counsel to her daughter causes confusion for *Clemencia's* character. Consequently, *Clemencia* hurts other women because she chooses to cheat with married men. Instead of marrying a man, she leads a single life of chaos to avoid her mother's mistake. The narrator says she is "guilty of having caused deliberate pain to other women. I'm vindictive and cruel and capable of anything".<sup>59</sup> In this excerpt, *Clemencia* describes herself as a malicious monster. It seems ridiculous how the narrator is able to harm other women, when she is a woman herself, similarly to her mother, who was able to hurt other Mexicans, although she is Mexican herself. She says that she has "witnessed [males] infidelities, and [she has] helped them to it. Unzipped and unhooked and agreed to clandestine maneuvers. I've been accomplice, committed premeditated crimes."<sup>60</sup> It seems as though *Clemencia* acts as an accessory to men, rather than an equal to a man. She acts this way because of the thoughts that her mother has instilled in her. "My mother did this to me. I guess she did it to spare me and *Ximena* the pain she went through. Having married a Mexican at seventeen."<sup>61</sup> Her mother wants her daughter to find better opportunities and a better husband than the Mexican one she ended up with. Although the mother tries to help the daughter by giving advice, she ultimately, scars the daughter emotionally to never love any man, much less a Mexican man. *Clemencia* blames her mother for her immoral lifestyle, even though the real culprit is racial stereotyping. As readers, we know that negative racial and gender stereotypes first hurt *Clemencia's* mother and caused emotional and physical damage to *Clemencia's* view of men, especially Mexican men.

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<sup>59</sup> Cisneros, 68.

<sup>60</sup> Cisneros, 69

<sup>61</sup> Cisneros, 69.

*Clemencia* gives men the upper hand, just as her mother gives the white man the upper hand. The daughter does not fight for her rights as a woman. She allows men to treat her shoddily, without putting up a fight. This side of *Clemencia* is fascinating, because in most other scenarios she seems to fight for her beliefs without apprehension. She describes Mexican women as strong, short, and snappy as opposed to the passive American trophy wife; “Once drunk on margaritas, I telephoned your father at four in the morning, woke the bitch up. Hello, she chirped. I wanted to talk to Drew. Just a moment. No Mexican woman would react like that.”<sup>62</sup> It was funny to the narrator that her white boyfriend’s wife did not question a phone call at 4 A.M. by a drunken woman. It gives the narrator a sense of satisfaction to kill “those” women, without their knowing. *Clemencia* does not realize that she is that by killing her own kind, she is killing herself and all women. With *Clemencia*’s view of men you would think that she would team up with Drew’s wife. The two do not become allies because patriarchal society disagrees with this idea. Deborah Madsen argues that women seek to be approved by patriarchal society. In general, it is thought that men hold power in society and therefore both of these women “need” Drew rather than each other. In addition, the women do not become allies against Drew because his wife feels racially superior and therefore *Clemencia* does not pose a threat to her position as Drew’s wife. The significance this holds within the larger picture is the conflict between white women and women of color is discussed among Chicana feminists, as they feel left out of the white feminist movement.

On the contrary, although *Clemencia* plays along with the sexual games of her adulterous lover, she takes her own strange revenge upon him. While his wife is away, *Clemencia* puts gummy bears in her makeup bag and nail polish bottles so only she

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<sup>62</sup> Cisneros, 77.

would find them. Then she seduces her lover's son and explains to him the story of adultery. She takes revenge against the white man who believes he can seduce a Mexican woman without marrying her. Her vengeance dates back to La Malinche, who was seduced by Cortez, but not good enough to marry. Often times, Chicanas find it difficult to marry white men because of the negative connotation that white men have towards Mexican women. In the process of trying to satisfy cultural/societal values, rather than their own, Chicanas have lost their sense of self. As a result, the cultural/social conflicts must be resolved before Chicanas can revive their identity and standard of living.

Overall, women have to work and fight together against patriarchal society. On the contrary, *Clemencia* is fighting on the side of the men in place of the women. In "Never Marry a Mexican" and "No Speak English", Sandra Cisneros implies that Chicanas do not have a place in U.S. society. In "Never Marry a Mexican", *Clemencia* is not considered Mexican or Anglo. She does not feel like an Anglo because she does not act like an Anglo. Likewise, she does not feel Mexican because she does not think like a Mexican and was not raised as a Mexican. Similarly, *Mamacita* in "No Speak English" feels strange in the United States because she does not assimilate with the American culture. *Mamacita* is the exact opposite of *Miss JIM-enez*. *Mamacita* longs for Mexico, while *Miss JIM-enez* longs for the "American dream". *Mamacita* is the passive Chicana that endures her pain without putting up a fight, while *Miss JIM-enez* is the outspoken secretary who has pulled through her struggle, despite the prejudices she faces from society. In both "No Speak English" and "Never Marry a Mexican", the literary paradigms of gender and race reveal that American culture devalues Chicanas. This devaluation gives little hope to Chicanas towards a better living circumstance. These

fictional stories which have been analyzed allow us to imagine the “inside” life story of these Chicana women. *Clemencia* and *Mamacita* especially feel trapped by American society. In contrast, Sandra Cisneros’s characterization of *Esperanza* (meaning hope) in the House on Mango Street gives Chicanas hope of a happy and meaningful life.

Maria Antonia Oliver-Rotger commends Sandra Cisneros’ House on Mango Street for its change in heart. At first, Cisneros produces the archetypal image of the Chicana and the role of “domesticity”. Cisneros shows how the absence of freedom and space is the result of entrapment in patriarchal society. The problem with *Esperanza*’s dream to move out of the House on Mango Street is that in reality she is not freeing herself of patriarchal society, although she may be freeing herself of her current economic situation. She just wants a “real house”, without even considering the hardship and sacrifice of obtaining a new house. Chicanas such as *Esperanza* “construct a hypothetical and illusory sense of freedom. All the female characters of the collection want houses [...and] they all seem to have internalized the ideology of womanhood and love whereby marriage is the immediate vehicle to inner freedom and the culmination of love.”<sup>63</sup> The women in *Esperanza*’s neighborhood are prisoners of motherhood and poverty. Freedom and cultural ideal of self-perfection are thought to be fulfilled with marriage. Cisneros turns the story around to a more hopeful message, when *Esperanza* grows older and improves her dream of self-perfection. Now, *Esperanza* desires a house of her own “not a man’s house, not a daddy’s. A house of my own.”<sup>64</sup> It is important for these women to gain a sense of identity outside of the domestic life, husbands, patriarchy, and even children. *Esperanza*’s dream of “a house of her own” comes from the

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<sup>63</sup> Maria Antonia Oliver-Rotger, Battlegrounds and Crossroads: Social and Imaginary Space in Writings by Chicanas, 176.

<sup>64</sup> Cisneros, The House on Mango Street, 100.

American dream. She equates a house of her own with upward social mobility. Furthermore, *Esperanza* must learn to “produce something that transcends her and makes her really exist or she will be left in the illusory doorway of someone else’s story, a fictional construct without power to give testimony or even to vocalize her unease.”<sup>65</sup> Through the characterization of *Esperanza*, Sandra Cisneros suggests that all women should strive to make a meaningful life for themselves outside of white male patriarchy. Cisneros suggests a way out and through the characterization of *Esperanza*, who shows her readers that they do not have to be a Malinche or a Virgen, but rather an *Esperanza*. In the last chapter the main character contemplates what it would be like to leave Mango Street: “One day I will pack my bags of books and paper. Friends and neighbors will say, What happened to that *Esperanza*? Where did she go with all those books and paper?”<sup>66</sup> *Esperanza* is concerned for the friends and family that live on Mango Street, whom she will leave behind. *Esperanza* is a good example of a “hopeful” character, as her name suggests. *Esperanza* is hoping for a house/space of her own where she can write. She realizes that such a house is difficult to attain for women confined by the rules of Mexican and American patriarchy. In this sense, it is imperative that Chicana authors, such as Sandra Cisneros, recreate spatial images of resistance according to women’s needs. Sandra Cisneros was quick to change the mind of *Esperanza*, who almost fell into the trap of domesticity. While *Esperanza* was developing herself into a Chicana feminist character, Cisneros is also developing her writing. The character of *Esperanza* parallels Cisneros because both women fulfill their hopes and dreams as feminists.

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<sup>65</sup> Castillo, Ana, *Talking Back*, 175.

<sup>66</sup> Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 110.

Artists and scholars alike need time and energy for creativity and studies. Therefore, Chicanas need to resist the traditional lifestyles available to them. Marriage, children, and even a regular job can leave limited time for concentration, thinking, and writing. In “Little Miracles, Kept Promises”, an artist writes to the Virgin of Guadalupe: “I don’t think I want to be a mother [...] At least a father could still be [an] artist, could love *something* instead of *someone*, and no one would call that selfish [...] I thank you for believing what I do is important. Though no one else in my family, no other woman, neither friend nor relative no one I know [...] wants to live alone.”<sup>67</sup> In this prayer, the writer suggests that mothers have a disadvantage when it comes to pursuing their passions and intellectual goals. Sadly, Chicanas are traditionally expected to move from the father’s household to the husband’s without question. Perhaps, this is why many Chicana writers choose to focus their writing on the oppressive nature of the traditional Chicana circumstance. Sandra Cisneros is an example of a Chicana writer who rejects traditional and stereotypical conditions: “Poetry, writing, becomes in Cisneros work much more than words on a page. Poetry is the real business of living because the writing process engages the poet in the difficult business of contesting all those cultural pressures that are placed upon the ethnic women.”<sup>68</sup> Cisneros understands that it is difficult for Chicanas to solely dedicate their life to a career rather than a husband and children. Chicanas feel the ever-present requirement to nurture the family just like the Virgin of Guadalupe. Cisneros explains: “None of us wants to abandon our culture. We’re very Mexican, we’re all very Chicanas. Part of being Mexican is that love and affinity we have for our cultura. We’re very family centered, and that family extends to

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<sup>67</sup> Cisneros, 13.

<sup>68</sup> Madsen, 128.

the whole Raza. We don't want to be exiled from our people.”<sup>69</sup> In other words, to reject a husband and children for a career would mean rejecting Mexican culture. No woman wants to be miss-interpreted by society as a “heartless work-a-holic”, even if though men in the same line of work are praised for their work.

Cherríe Moraga explains the importance of her education and race:

I was educated, but more than this I was ‘la güera’: fair-skinned. Born with the features of my Chicana mother, but the skin of my Anglo father, I had it made [...] No one ever quite told me this (that light was right), but I knew [...] [My mother] often called other lower-income Mexicans “braceros”, or “wetbacks”, referring to herself and her family as a “different class of people”. And yet, the real story was that my family, too, had been poor (some still are) and farm workers. My mother can remember this in her blood as if it were yesterday. But this is something she would like to forget, for to her, on a basic economic level, being Chicana meant being “less”. It was through my mother’s desire to protect her children from poverty and illiteracy that we became ‘anglocized’; the more effectively we could pass in the white world, the better guaranteed our future.<sup>70</sup>

Cherríe Moraga learned at a young age that being white is a privilege. Cherríe Moraga was “anglocized” in the same way that *Clemencia* from “Never Marry a Mexican” was. Both mothers believed in such a transformation so that their daughters would have a chance for success.

Unfortunately, the socioeconomic and educational statistics represent a small percentage of Chicano high school and college graduates:

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights issued its sixth and final report of a Mexican American Education Study called *Toward Quality Education for Mexican Americans*. This study indicated that among Mexican-American high school graduates in the Southwest, only twenty-two percent entered colleges in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Moreover, only 5.4 percent were college graduates, compared to 22.8 percent of Anglos.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Madsen, 129.

<sup>70</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga, *This Bridge Called my Back*, 28.

<sup>71</sup> Michelle Hall Kells, Valerie Balester, and Victor Villanueva, *Latino/a Discourses*, 43.



These statistics illustrate the need for social reform. Social reform would include equality and understanding among different races, genders, and social classes. As Jamie Mejía so nicely states;

Today we stand on a unique threshold of either the oblivion or the renaissance of making a huge difference in how language(s), literature(s), and culture(s) can be used as rhetorical bridges to enrich our lives. The alternative would continue to have our languages, literatures, and cultures crashing against each other to impoverish our lives even further. How we proceed past this long-standing threshold will indeed determine the strength and stability of Mexican and other indigenous cultures in the Southwest and, indeed, throughout all of our beloved Americas.

Chicanas must battle between self-identity and society. The stereotypical identity of Chicana women has been shaped by socialization. Boys and girls of all different backgrounds have been socialized into gender roles. For example, a baby boy is dressed in blue and given a “boy’s name”, while a baby girl is dressed in pink and given a “girl’s name”. Then the boy is given “boy toys” such as toy trucks and cars, while the girl is given “girl toys” such as dolls and play houses. Society therefore, sends an overt message to girls. The message seems to say that girls must be pretty and learn to “play house”. Without these expectations imposed by society, women all over the world would not be confined to the limiting role of the housewife. In *A Tolerance for Ambiguity*, one Chicana describes how her

education occurred in the kitchen; sometimes in holiday celebrations—but [also] in the lived example of women everyday. The phenomenal survival skills of women in my life and in the lives of other Latinas seemed almost to be fed to us, learned as we watched our mothers and grandmothers [...] I understood better how women supported each other, and even went beyond that—how women were able to participate in a major social and cultural revolution in measurable and practical ways.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Sam López, “A Tolerance for Ambiguity,” In *Post-Revolutionary Chicana Literature: Memoir, Folklore, and Fiction of the Border, 1900-1950*, 110.

As a result, women have their own socially constructed boundaries which keep men out. The service sector of the wives, mothers, and assistants is almost exclusively a woman-only sector. The realm of the kitchen, formerly a place of oppression, has become a self-empowering site for Chicana writers. Many writers refer to this “space” that is needed in order to let the imagination and creativity run wild. Women must therefore create spaces of their own in response to the social practices that contribute to gender subordination. The kitchen has become a place “where women have the potential to assert their individuality, put together their own concoctions, and subvert their ascribed domestic roles through the power of creativity.”<sup>73</sup> Comparing writing to the act of cooking and reading to the act of savoring a good meal, shows us that creative skill is needed in both cases. “The patriarchal notion of relegating women to the kitchen also carries the potential of giving women control of a space of their own—a unique, private, albeit ambivalent, space where Latina poets open up the possibility of subverting its role as an assigned place.”<sup>74</sup> Women regarded the home as a founding site for revising ideas about labor and identity. Service sectors, such as the home, consist of cultural and economic forces in a patriarchal society controlled by men. Economy, tradition, and ideologies are controlled by rich white men, leaving Chicanas of lower income in servitude. Latinas are segregated mostly into service jobs (31%) and clerical jobs (21%). Pay is especially low in female dominated fields. As a result, employment segregation constitutes a barrier to Latina advancement. Advancement for the Chicana is especially difficult. According to the UCLA Chicanos Research Center, the majority of the men of high income in the United States are Anglo. The median weekly earnings of native-born

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<sup>73</sup> María Claudia André, Chicanas and Latin American Women Writers Exploring the Realm of the Kitchen as a Self-Empowering Site, i.

<sup>74</sup> André, ii.

Latinos are \$555, while the median weekly earnings of native-born whites are \$720. This leaves Chicanas as servants to Mexican-American men that might already be in low social-economic circumstances. According to Anna Nieto-Gomez, machismo puts women in this inferior circumstance. The Chicana stereotype is that of the nurturing woman who have the responsibility of supporting a nurturing environment in the home, allowing men to work outside of the home. Because of machismo, women are expected to work and endure the hardships of life without complaint. When women complain of this “duty”, it is looked down upon by patriarchal society. Although, patriarchal society puts women in a position of servitude, women have resisted and reconstructed themselves.

In Woman Hollering Creek, Sandra Cisneros describes a Barbie doll as a social construct. Toys play a major role in the socialization of boys and girls. Sandra Cisneros describes how the narrator played with her Barbie: “Every time the same story. Your Barbie is roommates with my Barbie, and my Barbie’s boyfriend comes over and your Barbie steals him. Then the two Barbies fight.”<sup>75</sup> Then “lying on the street next to the tool bits [the narrator finds] ‘Career Gal’ [the one with the] snappy black and white business suit, three-quarter length sleeve jacket with kick-pleat skirt, red sleeveless shell, gloves, pumps, and matching hat included.”<sup>76</sup> By playing with these Barbies, the narrator only becomes concerned with dressing and grooming her Barbie so that she can “snag” the male Ken doll. The “Career Gal” is dressed as if her only job is to look good. Her actual career is not an issue. She does not come with books, but rather a matching hat. In the end, the narrator cannot afford the Barbies and all of the accessories that come with

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<sup>75</sup> Sandra Cisneros, Woman Hollering Creek, 14.

<sup>76</sup> Cisneros, 15.

them. She resorts to Barbie that “has a left foot that’s melted a little [...] If you dress her in her new ‘Prom Pinks’ outfit, satin splendor with matching coat, gold belt, clutch, and hair bow included, so long as you don’t lift her dress, right?—who’s to know.”<sup>77</sup>

Gloria Anzaldúa recalls her confusion of her Chicana identity according to her culture and her mother; “Through our mothers, the culture gave us mixed messages: No voy a dejar que ningún pelado desgraciado maltrate a mis hijos. And in the next breath it would say, La mujer tiene que hacer lo que le diga el hombre. Which was it to be—strong, or submissive, rebellious or conforming?” On the one hand, her mother would not let a man mistreat her children. On the other hand, her mother would believe that women should obey men’s orders. Gloria Anzaldúa seeks “new images of identity, new beliefs about ourselves, our humanity and worth no longer in question.”<sup>78</sup> Anzaldúa is constantly trying to re-construct not only Chicana identity, but all human identity. “Perhaps now that the Chicana is more aware, more educated, more politically and socially attuned, and thus less dependent, she will assume her rightful place alongside her man—rather than below or behind him.”<sup>79</sup> Anzaldúa concludes that the new wave of Chicanas will work together with man rather than allowing herself to be trampled on.

However, the fight in opposition to these negative stereotypes has created a stronger Chicana and therefore created a Chicana culture is a culture of resistance. Chicanas have resisted their social roles through literature in the examples of many Chicana writers such as Sandra Cisneros, Pat Mora, Ana Castillo, Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherrie Moraga, Norma Cantú, Luis Valdez, Richard Rodriguez, Gina Valdés, Ana Castillo, Michele Serros, and Lorna Dee Cervantes. These authors “not only were

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<sup>77</sup> Cisneros, 16.

<sup>78</sup> Anzaldúa, 109.

<sup>79</sup> Apodaca, 43.

describing loss of their lands and culture, but they were actively resisting culturally defined roles.”<sup>80</sup> Oppressive gender, racial, and class roles imposed by both Mexican and American society has brought suffering for many Chicanas. In the United States, being brown, a woman, and poor are all types of poverty. These racist, sexist, and classist discriminations hinder the success of many Chicanas.

On the bright side, the fight in opposition to these negative stereotypes has made Chicanas stronger. In “Little Miracles, Kept Promises,” Sandra Cisneros compiles prayers written to La Virgencita. Many of these prayers describe the strength of La Virgen: “That you could have the power to rally a people when a country was born, and again during civil war, and during a farm workers’ strike in California made me think maybe there is power in my mother’s patience, strength in my grandmother’s endurance. Because those who suffer have a special power, don’t they? The power of understanding someone else’s pain. And understanding is the beginning of healing.”<sup>81</sup> Without pain and suffering, one would not be able to relate with others. All humans suffer injustice because the world is not a fair place. Those who suffer more, learn more and gain strength and understanding from their experiences. In the third literary wave Chicana author Gloria Anzaldúa focuses on a bi-cultural theme, expressing the dual nature of all cultures.

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<sup>80</sup> López, 111.

<sup>81</sup> Cisneros, 14.

## **PART THREE**

### **Third Wave: Toward a Bi-Cultural Turn?**

#### **3.1- Gloria Anzaldúa's fight towards a unified America**

Instead of using fictional characters to describe Chicana identity, Anzaldúa expresses the multi-faceted nature of la Chicana. In “La conciencia de la mestiza/Towards a New Consciousness,” Gloria Anzaldúa speaks on behalf of the women of her race. She describes how this mestiza race is a struggle of borders. Anzaldúa herself “continually walks out of one culture and into another, because [she] is in all cultures at the same time...The ambivalence from the clash of voices results in mental and emotional states of perplexity.”<sup>82</sup> The mestiza is a mixed breed and must deal with the consequences of a mixed race: tricultural, monolingual, bilingual, or multilingual. Chicanas get mixed messages from opposing Native American, Mexican, and Anglo cultures. Therefore Anzaldúa states “The coming together of two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference causes a cultural collision.”<sup>83</sup> This cultural collision causes a dual nature of “oppressor” and the “oppressed.” This constant fight of “cop” versus “criminal” promotes violence and prevents agreement. In addition to cultural discrimination, gender discrimination between male and female creates more differences than similarities in way that we perceive each other. The reality is that every person should be treated equally no matter what gender, race, or class they

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<sup>82</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, “La conciencia de la mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness”, Latino Boom, 414.

<sup>83</sup> Anzaldúa, 414.

are. Anzaldúa encompasses each of these issues, as she tries to promote unity and cooperation among the different genders, races, and social classes.

Anzaldúa gets many of her ideas from José Vasconcelos, who was a famous Mexican philosopher. He explains the mestizo race as the first global synthesis consisting of a blend of different races. José Vasconcelos called el mestizo a “cosmic race [that embraced] all the races of the world.”<sup>84</sup> Vasconcelos’ theory is “opposite to the theory of the pure Aryan, and to the policy of racial purity that white America practices”. Instead the mestizo theory is inclusive rather than exclusive. The mixture of races does not result in an inferior being, (as many Anglos suggest) but instead a “more malleable species with a rich gene pool. From this racial, ideological, cultural and biological crosspollination, an [new] consciousness is presently in the making—a new mestiza consciousness, una conciencia de mujer.”<sup>85</sup>

Anzaldúa informs her readers of the struggles of the mestiza race, where as Vasconcelos describes the mestizo race as a rich mix of cultures. Anzaldúa focuses on the role of women within the mestiza race, while Vasconcelos primarily deals with the theory which the Aryan race is the less dominant race. Vasconcelos causes us to ask ourselves what would be different if the mestizo race were the dominant race. Vasconcelos leaves out gender issues, just as other early Chicano authors and intellectuals have. Anzaldúa serves to correct this Chicano group by explaining the importance of the new mestiza consciousness, una conciencia de mujer.

A new consciousness has been suggested by Gloria Anzaldúa. The new consciousness (la mestiza) must learn to work together with all of her cultures. The new

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<sup>84</sup> Anzaldúa, 414.

<sup>85</sup> Anzaldúa, 414.

mestiza copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions or ambiguity. She learns to shift habitual formations by being Indian in Mexican culture and Mexican from the Anglo point of view. La mesitza therefore unites everything that is separate. The struggle against racism, sexism, and classism will hopefully bring an end to violence, rape, and war.

Only with a “tolerance for ambiguity” can one truly fight violence, rape, and war. In other words, only by remaining flexible, the Chicana is able to keep an open mind and “stretch her psyche horizontally and vertically”.<sup>86</sup> The Chicana constantly has to adapt and “shift out of habitual formations; from convergent thinking, analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality to move toward a single goal (a Western mode), to divergent thinking, characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals and toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes.”<sup>87</sup> For a Chicana, it must be difficult to constantly have to change your method of philosophy and way of life. Chicanas must learn to not only act differently in different environments, but also think differently. As Anzaldúa states; “The new mestiza copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to juggle cultures.”<sup>88</sup> At any point in time the many contradictions and confusions of identity can build up until la mestiza cannot tolerate the ambivalence any longer. When she is trapped by ambivalence from intense, and often painful, emotional events, all of her different characteristics are bound to collide. During this collision, all the separate dimensions work together. La mestiza cannot leave behind any part of her identity. Instead, Chicana identity must work

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<sup>86</sup> Anzaldúa, 415.

<sup>87</sup> Anzaldúa, 415.

<sup>88</sup> Anzaldúa, 415.



similarly to the human body in the sense that each body part is needed to live a healthy life.

In attempting to work out a synthesis, the self has added a third element which is greater than the sum of its severed parts. That third element is a new consciousness—at mestiza consciousness—and though it is a source of intense pain, its energy comes from continual creative motion that keeps breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm.<sup>89</sup>

Just as our body parts need to work together, all individuals in society are called to work together. As Anzaldúa states; “A massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness is the beginning of a long struggle”.<sup>90</sup> In other words, not only Chicanas must struggle for equality. Without the help of others, rich white males will continue to dominate and inequality will persist. “The answer to the problem between the white race and the colored, between males and females, lies in healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our languages, our thoughts.”<sup>91</sup> “Healing the split” first and foremost requires understanding of other cultures, languages, and thoughts. The root causes of each split are diverse and complex.

Starting with machismo, the root cause of machismo is centered in the home. For Anzaldúa’s father, machismo meant “being strong enough to protect and support [her family], yet showing love.”<sup>92</sup> For others, machismo is an adaptation to oppression, poverty, and low self-esteem. This type of machismo stems from the hierarchical male dominance. In simple terms, Anglos oppress Chicanos, and therefore Chicanos oppress Chicanas. As the Chicano loses a sense of dignity and respect because of Anglo

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<sup>89</sup> Anzaldúa, 415.

<sup>90</sup> Anzaldúa, 416.

<sup>91</sup> Anzaldúa, 416.

<sup>92</sup> Anzaldúa, 418.

oppression, the macho breeds a false machismo which leads him to put down women and even abuse them. The Chicano fear of Anglo dominance, therefore results in the domination of women. In order to feel powerful macho men, they must exert their power on women.

Machismo is not excused although we understand the root causes of male dominance. In this circumstance, not only should mestizas work together towards gender equality, but all women and men should work towards gender equality. Once again, it becomes evident that the Chicana struggle is also the white man's struggle. "As long as los hombres think they have to chingar mujeres and each other to be men, as long as men are taught that they are superior and therefore culturally favored over la mujer, there can be no real healing of our psyches."<sup>93</sup> In order for gender equality to truly flourish, specific mechanisms are needed to establish equality within institutions, schools, the work force, the household and all other cultural, social, and political establishments.

Clearly, people of all colors compose the society that helps establish the households, institutions, schools, and workforce. Therefore we must recognize that "we are one people"<sup>94</sup> in a collective society. Out of necessity, we are one people with many similarities rather than countless people with many differences. Once more, "healing the split" first and foremost requires understanding of all people. In "By Your True Faces We Will Know You" Anzaldúa articulates this point:

Before the Chicano and the undocumented worker and the Mexican from the other side can come together, before the Chicano can have unity with Native Americans and other groups, we need to know the history of their struggle and they need to know ours. Our mothers, our sister and brothers, they guys who hang out on street corners, the children in the playgrounds, each of us must know our Indian lineage, our afro-mestizaje, our history of resistance...The Latino

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<sup>93</sup> Anzaldúa, 419.

<sup>94</sup> Anzaldúa, 420.

movement (Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, Cubans and other Spanish-speaking people working together to combat racial discrimination in the market place) is good but it is not enough. Other than a common culture we will have nothing to hold us together. We need to meet on a broader communal ground.<sup>95</sup>

It is not enough to only understand the Chicano culture of resistance, but also the struggles of the immigrant Latino, the Anglo in power, the working class Anglo, Black Asian, American Indian, and so on. The struggle is inner, but played in the outer terrains. First we must be aware of the situation, then we must change internally, and lastly we must change as a society. The lack of stereotypes and prejudices allows for a true understanding of a culture. Nothing happens in the “real” world unless it first happens in the images in our heads. When we mentally reject/judge others we are directly hurting them. As Anzaldúa states; “Rejection strips us of self-worth, our vulnerability exposes us to shame. It is our innate identity you find wanting. We are ashamed that we need your good opinion, that we need your acceptance.”<sup>96</sup> She suggests that Chicanas can no longer resist the Anglo, Indian, and Mexican ways. Instead on “the day of the Chicana”

Chicanas search for dignity and embrace their mestiza race:

To rage and look upon you with contempt is to rage and be contemptuous of ourselves. We can no longer blame you, nor disown the white parts, the male parts, the pathological parts, the queer parts, the vulnerable parts. Here we are weaponless with open arms. Let’s try it our way the mestiza way, the Chicana way, the woman way.<sup>97</sup>

The mestiza way knows not to place blame because no further progress can be achieved with such a mentality. Anzaldúa recalls the teachers at her segregated elementary school: “I remember how the white teachers used to punish us for being

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<sup>95</sup> Anzaldúa, 421.

<sup>96</sup> Anzaldúa, 422.

<sup>97</sup> Anzaldúa, 422.

Mexican.”<sup>98</sup> Despite experiencing such prejudice, Anzaldúa encourages las mestizas not to blame whites for such actions. Anzaldúa is convinced that we can work together to heal racial wounds. Instead of being a victim, she believes that society can change. Anzaldúa believes that humanity can work together as a community just as Chicanas have by focusing on our similarities rather than our differences. This proposal means erasing all prejudices and stereotypes.

Rather than using prejudices and stereotypes to characterize a group of people, Anzaldúa uses metaphors. Gloria Anzaldúa thinks that a metaphor has the force to build the collective thoughts of a society linguistically and visually. Gloria Anzaldúa uses the metaphor making faces, for the construction of Chicana identity. She claims that identity exists between the “masks that provides the space from which we can thrust out and crack the masks.”<sup>99</sup> In other words, Chicana identity is constantly changing over time and space. There is no point in time when the mask completely fits. Gloria Anzaldúa describes this awkward stage of life using the word “*Neplanta*”, which is the

Nahuatl word for the space between two bodies of water, the space between two worlds. It is a limited space, [...] where you are not this or that but where you are changing. You haven’t got into the new identity yet and haven’t left the old identity behind either—you are in a kind of transition...it is very awkward, uncomfortable and frustrating to be in that *Neplanta* because you are in the midst of transformation.<sup>100</sup>

Gloria Anzaldúa suggests that Chicanas are in danger of losing not only their identity but their humanity. Such a confusion of place and time can truly harm a person. Most humans have trouble living in one place at a time, not to mention two places at a time. Cisneros also makes an effort to depict the cross cultural identity between the patriarchal

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<sup>98</sup> Anzaldúa, 424.

<sup>99</sup> Elisabeth Mermann- Jozwiak, “Performing Identities: Spatial Metaphors and Subjectivity in Anzaldúa, Mora, and Viramontes,” In Postmodern Vernaculars: Chicana Literature and Postmodern Rhetoric, 41.

<sup>100</sup> Mermann-Jozwiak, 41.

societies in Mexican and American cultures. Sandra Cisneros' characters portray this feeling of being a Mexican woman living in an American society, but not belonging to either culture. They feel neither Mexican nor American...which is why they are "Mexican-American".

Chicano studies has helped Chicanas find their "true self" in the midst of chaos as an alternative to the dominant media, academic disciplines, and mainstream culture. The Chicano movement has made an effort to look at the history of common cultural conditions and the legacy of the conquest of Mexico. This collective strategy is effective as opposed to the emphasis of segregation through negative stereotypes. The term Chicano signified the affirmation of working-class and indigenous origins, and the rejection of assimilation, acculturation, and the myth of the American melting pot. Instead of calling themselves "Mexican-Americans", "Chicanos" was a term which defined their struggle. We must keep in mind that the Chicana struggle is not the only component of Chicana identity.

The dominant regimes of Chicano/a representation are full of negative stereotypes which come from Hollywood, academic disciplines, and mainstream culture. After the Chicano movement, Chicanos no longer described themselves as Mexican-Americans or Spanish-Americans, but as Chicanos. The term Chicano implies the declaration of the working class and indigenous origins, while discarding assimilation, acculturation, and the myth of the "melting pot". Chicano/a cultural identity is problematic and calls for social struggle. From this point of view, Chicano/aa identity is static without any change. The viewpoint of the struggling Chicana is somewhat presumptive and static. Not all

Chicano/as are struggling. As Stuart Hall reminds us in Angie Chabram's "Chicana/o cultural representations: Reframing alternative critical discourses":

Though we speak in our names, of ourselves, from own experience, nonetheless, who it is who speaks and the subject spoken of, are never exactly in the same place. Identity is therefore not transparent; it is not as unproblematic; it is no guarantee of authenticity. Perhaps then instead of thinking identity as an already accomplished historical fact...we should think of identity as a production which is never complete, which is constituted inside, not outside representation.<sup>101</sup>

In other words, one Chicana's self-representation is not equal to how all Chicana's represent themselves. Therefore, one Chicana experience and representation cannot be generalized for all Chicanas. Many people do not know how to identify themselves let alone other individuals. This is, in part, why it is so difficult to identify the true identity of any given group, such as Chicanas, because they are made up of many individuals. In addition, identity is "constituted inside, not outside" because we are who we decide we are. In other words, only you can define your identity. Chicanas have trouble defining their identity because they are made up of a confusing "mezcla" of cultures: "I'm a bell without a clapper. A woman with one foot in this world and on foot in that. A woman straddling both."<sup>102</sup> Since Chicanas are part of two cultures, they feel as if they are part of both Mexican and American worlds. In reality, cultural identities are constantly being constructed;

Cultural identity is not a fixed once-and-for-all, not a phantasm...Rather cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of suture which are made in the discourses of history and culture. Hence there is always a politics of identity because as Gramsci says, there is always a war of positions.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Angie Chabram and Rosa Linda Fregoso, "Chicana/o cultural representations: Reframing alternative critical discourses", In The Chicano/a: cultural studies reader, 28.

<sup>102</sup> Sandra Cisneros, "Little Kept Promises", In A Celestial Omnibus: Short Fiction on Faith, 13.

<sup>103</sup> Chabram, 29.

Cultural identity is not defined by the dominant media, the Chicano movement, or by social constructs. Instead, cultural identity is uniquely defined by each individual. Mainstream culture has generally placed all Latinos into one minority group along with other people of color. Such general categorization of marginal peoples of color has robbed Chicanas of their own identity and culture. Chicanas, as members of these “non-traditional” groups, need to form a community or common culture to participate in the battle of cultural literacy and resist homogenization. Williams describes the common culture as “an educated and participatory democracy...In speaking of a common culture, one is asking, precisely, for that free, contributive and common process of participation in the creation of meanings and value.”<sup>104</sup> If we dare to define the common Chicano culture, it can best be described as a mestiza, bi-cultural nature, as Anzaldúa and many Chicano/a authors and intellectuals suggest.

The Chicana struggle cannot be separate from the concerns, problems, and issues that exist outside the walls of academia. Chicanas should continue to fight by telling their lived experience as minorities, women, and the poor U.S. society. As an answer, we as scholars cannot remain “detached” from the issues that surround us. The future of Chicana studies does not stop at the university level. But rather, the real success and survival lies within the community and society as a whole. It is our duty to speak out against injustice and resist the dominant culture that oppresses us. Besides community assistance, education can free Chicanos from oppressive circumstances.

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<sup>104</sup> Soldatenko-Gutiérrez, 424.

## **PART FOUR**

### **Living in a Bi-cultural America**

#### **4.1- Chicano/a life: a struggle between mainstream and *el otro lado***

If in the first wave, Chicano authors were resisting against mainstream literature, in the third wave, by contrast, an increasing number of Chicano/a authors are attempting to incorporate Chicano/a literature within mainstream literature. A clear indication of this turn is the emphasis on suburbia and the middle class. Previous settings for Chicano/a literature were based in lower class neighborhoods, where as now Chicano/a literature are a part of the suburban mainstream of North American culture. The location and social status of the Chicano/a has changed and Chicano/as are seen as a more integral part of North American society, while many of the previous issues concerning race, class, and gender are gradually to diminishing.

In popular usage, “mainstream” has associated itself to the center of powerful institutions, associating itself with “Pleasantville”, suburbia, middle-class, and a white American world. Most Chicanas have grown up in an anti-North American culture, outside of the mainstream. The tables have turned as the recent Chicano/a entry into the world of popular literature now shapes mainstream literature, instead of mainstream literature directing Chicano/a literature. This blossoming Chicano literature gives evidence towards a post-ethnic America is surpassing the ethnic struggle! Chicana narration gives voice to a group of people that had been silenced for so long. According



to Yolanda Gonzalez, “Given the reality of past and present exclusionary practices, of exclusion from participation in the dominant society’s institutions (political, cultural, economic), we cannot help but marvel when a person of color ‘crosses over’ (a popular term reflecting the divide) into mainstream.”<sup>105</sup> Chicana/o writers such as Pat Mora, Richard Rodriguez, Gina Valdés, and Lorna Dee Cervantes, and Cherrie Moraga have clearly contributed to the ideological changes of mainstream literature.

Questions of legitimacy and authenticity are invoked when Latino/a literature becomes a highlight of mainstream “mass literature”. Although many skeptics criticize new themes and perspectives of literature written by successful female writers and published by important national publishing houses as trying to please the market, Ilan Stavans celebrates the process of “mainstreaming by which Latinos have ceased to be belligerent in the way they typically were during the anti-establishment decade of the 1960’s. Instead, the new generation has learned to use the mass media, the enemy’s tools, to infiltrate the system and to promote a revaluation of things Hispanic.”<sup>106</sup> Stavans notes that Latinos are still fighting against the dominant culture, but rather in a more strategic way. Instead of assimilating or resisting American culture completely, Chicanos have chosen to mix cultures, as emphasized by Spanglish “as an astonishing linguistic force.”<sup>107</sup> Many Chicana poets from this fourth section use Spanglish to get their point across.

The “new mestiza” live in a marginal region where conflicts and tensions arise from living in the middle, not belonging entirely to either the mainstream, suburban,

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<sup>105</sup> Broyles-González, 267.

<sup>106</sup> Raphael Dalleo, and Elena Sáez, *The Latino Canon and the Emergence of Post-Sixties Literature*, 2.

<sup>107</sup> Dalleo, 2.

middle-class, white American world, or to the underground systems of life in which many Chicanos network and operate.<sup>108</sup> In many examples, U.S. culture pushes Chicanos toward the outskirts of an “American” mainstream culture through the media and other forms of marginalization. Some of the characters assimilate or resist the mainstream society. Pat Mora’s character named *Elena* tries to learn English (the dominant language) to help her children’s future. Even though *Elena*’s family has seemingly assimilated and mainstreamed themselves into North American society, *Elena* lags behind due to gender inequality. Her daughter, of the new generation, had no problem assimilating because she grew up in “American” culture, but *Elena* has to learn from scratch, which presents a problem because her husband is unwilling to help her.

Pat Mora uses *Elena*’s character to portray a Chicana’s struggle to learn English. *Elena* does not speak sufficient English compared to her husband and children. She is always embarrassed of her inability to master the English language. This character is similar to Sandra’s Cisneros characterization of *Mamacita*. Both *Mamacita* and *Elena* feel trapped by their inability to speak English. *Mamacita* sits by the window, rarely leaving her house because she is afraid to speak English. *Mamacita* feels as though the outside world expects her to speak English. In contrast, *Elena* struggles with English inside her home: all of *Elena*’s children “sit around the kitchen table and laugh with one another [while *Elena*] sits by the stove and feels dumb, alone.”<sup>109</sup> In this case, *Elena*’s own family expects her to speak English. Each time *Elena* sits down to learn English, her husband frowns at her, making her feel as though it is an absurd idea for *Elena* to learn English. Then *Elena*’s child observes her father frowning and claims “Mama, he doesn’t

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<sup>108</sup> John Christie, “The Fringe World: Introduction”, *Latino Boom*, 307.

<sup>109</sup> Pat Mora, “Elena”, *Latino Boom*, 369.

want you to be smarter than he is.”<sup>110</sup> It is curious that *Elena*’s husband does nothing to help his wife learn English, and in fact would rather keep her illiterate. It is almost as if he is too macho to allow his wife the equality she deserves in the relationship. *Elena*’s husband keeps her trapped from her children and the rest of society. *Elena*’s children could be an example of the emerging middle class that we see in today’s Chicano culture. *Elena*’s children seem to understand and accept the dual nature of their culture. They do not argue with one Mexican culture or American culture. The middle class consists of the new generations which play a more satisfying role in North American society than their parent’s generation. This middle class is a sign that the parent generation has reached their goal of providing for their children. In this sense, it seems as though La Lucha Chicana has been successful.

*Elena* feels humiliated for being determined to learn English: “Sometimes I take my English book and lock myself in the bathroom, say the thick words softly.”<sup>111</sup> *Elena* finds this space in her bathroom, where her husband will not bother her. In this space of her own, she pronounces the harsh sounding words. *Elena* is continues to be firm in her decision to learn English, even though she must learn in secret. The story shows her determination to learn English, despite her husband’s lack of support is evidence to the Chicana struggle. Chicanas such as *Elena* are constantly struggling against patriarchal society, even if the dominating group includes her own husband. *Elena* wants to help her children and therefore it is important for her to learn English. It is clear that *Elena*’s primary objective is to help her children, rather than dominate her husband by learning English. It can be concluded that *Elena* learned English because of her drive and desire

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<sup>110</sup> Mora, 369.

<sup>111</sup> Mora, 369.

to help her children. Her love for her children is a type of love that cannot be separated by language or society. Elena feels like an outsider in her own home, as Chicanas feel like outsiders in the United States. Although Chicanas are citizens and may even consider the United States their country of origin, many Chicanas feel like “legal aliens”.

#### **4.2- Chicana poets speak of present-day conditions for Chicanas in the struggle for self-reliance and a concrete identity**

Chicana poets write about present-day conditions regarding the search for identity and the struggle for self-reliance. Chicanas want to be able to rely on themselves rather than a man now. They are beginning to break all of society’s rules and fight for a better place/role in North American society.

Pat Mora continues to describe the dual nature of the Chicano/a in American society and Mexican society. Despite the struggle of bi-culturalism that Chicano/as face, Chicano/as do not give up their bi-cultural identity. Chicano/as do not give in by taking sides with one culture or the other, but rather remain “legal aliens”.

Bi-lingual, Bi-cultural,  
American but hyphenated,  
Viewed by Anglos as perhaps exotic,  
Perhaps inferior, definitely different,  
Viewed by Mexicans as alien,  
(Their eyes say, “You speak Spanish  
But you’re not like me)  
smiling back and forth  
between the fringes of both worlds  
by smiling  
by masking the discomfort  
of being pre-judged  
Bi-laterally.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Pat Mora, “Legal Alien”, Latino Boom, 370.

This poem emphasizes the two cultures that toss and turn in the body, boil in the blood, and confuse the mind of Chicano/as. Mora clarifies the sense of alienation, which Chicano/as receive from both Mexicans and Americans. Chicano/as live in two worlds that constantly judge them, but rarely accepts them for their new mestiza. Luckily many Chicano/a artists such as Pat Mora fight for the new mestiza ideology. The new mestiza ideology suggests an America in which both North American and Mexican cultures cooperate. This ideology may seem idealistic due to the history between Mexico and the United States, but it is a necessary solution as Mexican and North American cultures emerge in this day and age.

Another Chicana poet from the Latino Boom anthology is Lorna Dee Cervantes. This poem, as well as other poems representing this literary wave, delves into the lives of these Chicana women. The poems describe the life of bi-culturalism in the United States.

We were a woman family:  
Grandma, or innocent Queen;  
Mama, the Swift Knight, Fearless Warrior.  
Mama wanted to be Princess instead.

Myself: I could never decide.  
So I turned to books, those staunch upright men.  
I became a Scribe: Translator of Foreign Mail.  
I paid the bills, did light man-work, fixed faucets.  
[Grandma] trusts only what she builds  
with her own hands.

She built her own house,  
cocky, disheveled carpentry,  
after living twenty-five years with a man who tried to kill her.

Grandma from the hills of Santa Barbara,  
I would open my eyes to see her hair in loose braids.

Mama said, "It's [Grandma's] own fault,  
getting screwed by a man for that long.

Sure as shit [she] wasn't hard."  
Soft she was soft.

"You're too soft...always were.  
You'll get nothing but shit.  
Baby, don't count on nobody."  
--a mother's wisdom.  
Soft. I haven't changed,  
maybe grown more silent, cynical  
on the outside.

"But Mama, if you're good to them  
They'll be good to you back."

Back. The freeway is across the street.  
Every night I sleep with a gentle man  
and in time, I tie up my hair into loose braids,  
and trust only what I have built  
with my own hands.<sup>113</sup>

The poem gives the impression that the protagonist is a mixture of her Grandma ("innocent Queen") and her Mom ("Swift Knight and Fearless Woman"). The last paragraph indicates that the protagonist is the epitome of her Grandmother and the opposite of her mother. Her grandmother slept with men, wore her hair in loose braids, and only trusted what she built just like her granddaughter. Such an ending to the poem poses the question: Have women of this third generation undermined the second generation? Are we allowing the oppression of patriarchal society to seep through, even though our mothers have protested? In response, apparently each generation has used different methods to resist patriarchal society. Although the first generation "puts up with her psycho-killing husband," she only trusts the house that she builds with her own hands,. The second generation has no mercy for men or anyone else that could possibly hurt her. The third generation is "soft" or more understanding of men, but she is "sileand

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<sup>113</sup> Cervantes, 231-33.

cynical on the outside.” This means that the third generation seems hard on the outside, as her grandmother was by building her own house, but at the same time she is soft on the inside. The inside is where her mother claims that she will “get screwed by a man.” The narrator feels as though she can wash her “soft” nature away if someone were to hurt her. At first the protagonist questioned her mother, thinking if you do good, you will also receive good. As the third generation grows, she learns to live like her grandmother, but think like her mother. Although she sleeps with a man, she trusts no one. Therefore she is silent in her cynicism toward the “gentle” man. The protagonist does not reveal her full opinion of the gentle man. On the surface it appears as though the granddaughter fully trusts the gentle man, but on the inside she knows that he cannot be trusted as her mother has taught her. Internally she solely relies on herself, but she strategically allows the gentle man to believe she relies on him.

Caught between two generations and two societies, Chicanas came to identify with a bi-cultural identity. In the early years of the twentieth century, societies were undergoing rapid change. Revolutionary ideas began to conflict with traditional ideas. Literature moved along with these changes: life was not understandable from a single, simplistic point of view, and consequentially, writers wrote in a confused writing style. The poem “Where you from?” by Gina Valdés perfectly describes a confused world in which the protagonist lives. The border between the United States and Mexico is fragmented itself as it “shifts with the movements of people who maneuver/ [work] between two worlds in order to improve their lives.”<sup>114</sup> Valdés even writes in Spanglish to portray the confused nature of bi-culturalism near the border.

Soy de aquí (I am from here)

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<sup>114</sup> John Christie, “The Fringe World: Introduction,” Latino Boom, 307.

Y soy de allá (and from there)  
born in L.A.  
del otro lado (from the other side)  
y de éste (and this one)  
crecí en L.A. (I grew up in L.A.)  
my mouth  
still tastes  
of naranjas (oranges)  
con chile (with chile)  
soy del sur (I am from the south)  
y del norte (and the north)  
crecí zurda (I grew up left-handed)  
teras crossing (crossing frontiers)  
tartamuda (stuttering)  
y mareada (and dizzy)  
I didn't build  
this border  
that halts me  
the word fron-  
tera splits  
on my tongue<sup>115</sup>

“Frontera” or “border” splits on her tongue just like the sweet taste of oranges (from California) and the spicy taste of chile (from Mexico). She claims that she is from both here and there, this side and that side, the north and the south, Mexico and the United States, San Andreas, and L.A. This makes her lost in this world of doubles. Her tongue also splits in a more literal sense between English and Spanish. The author may choose certain Spanish words instead of English words to reveal the true meaning of the word. For instance, within the context, the word “mareada” not only means “dizzy” but also “sea-sick”. Since many Latinos have crossed the border by boat this term has special significance in Spanish. Other words may have a more cultural connotation. Valdes is willing to play with the two languages to fully portray the mestiza lifestyle/language. This type of reinventing language empowers the author’s text.

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<sup>115</sup> Gina Valdés, “Where you from?”, Latino Boom, 378.



Ana Castillo “combines political fire with humor and feminism” in her poem called “Women are not Roses”.

Women have no  
beginning  
only continual  
flows.  
Though rivers flow  
women are not  
rivers.  
Women are not  
roses  
They are not oceans  
or stars.  
i would like to tell  
her this but  
i think she already knows<sup>116</sup>

Ana Castillo is emphasizing how women cannot be compared to objects as they have been in the past. Women were always compared to roses in romantic poetry. Women are not roses because they are much more complex than a pretty flower which shrivels as soon as it is taken out of the ground. Although most women have continual flows, this is not their only characteristic and therefore women cannot be compared to rivers. Ana Castillo knows that women are aware of this fact. This poem could be geared towards men who treat women as rivers or roses. Women should not be classified by her period or her beauty. Castillo’s rather strait forward poem reminds the reader to stay away from naming, stereotyping, or labeling any culture, race, gender, or class. When we label, it gets us into trouble. For example, if all women would allow men to define them by their beauty, the world would lack advancement.

Castillo calls us to understand the complexity of the “new mestiza”. If one digs deeper, it can be recognized that women are much more than pretty objects. Women

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<sup>116</sup> Ana Castillo, “Women Are Not Roses,” Latino Boom, 534.

have a greater purpose within society than a flower. Castillo wants to prove that all members of society have a large role in the shaping of our culture. When we negate the worth of one member, we are also denying our own importance. The “new mestiza” calls for the realization that we are all mestizos and we all need each other.

I will conclude the third literary wave with a quote from Richard Rodriguez’s essay “Go North, Young Man”:

Latin Americans have long complained that the gringo, with characteristic, with characteristic arrogance, hijacked the word ‘American’ and gave it all to himself—‘the way he stole the land.’ I remember, years ago, my aunt in Mexico City scolding me when I told her I came from ‘America.’ Pocho! Didn’t I realize that the entire hemisphere is America? ‘Listen’ my Mexican aunt told me, ‘people who live in the United States are *norteamericanos*.’

If we can eliminate all connotations and stereotypes that accompany “norteamericanos” and “Latin Americans”, all Americans (people of the Americas) could learn to work together. Instead of seeing each other as separate groups, we must learn to envision ourselves as one people, just as Chicanos must learn to live with both cultures. The bi-cultural paradigm therefore reflects a new way of looking at culture, by seeing both sides of Chicano culture: Mexican and American together. In other words, a Chicano child cannot be expected to choose his Mexican side or his American side, but rather understand that he/she is equally a part of both cultures. Similarly, Mexican and American parent cultures should work together to preserve this ideology. All previous wounds between the parent cultures must be healed in order for the Chicano to live a full, healthy lifestyle.

## CONCLUSION

Although Chicanas of low economic status face many struggles according to race, class, and gender, many Chicanas rise above these hardships. Chicana authors such as Ana Castillo, Pat Mora, Norma Cantú, Gina Valdés, and Lorna Dee Cervantes, and Cherrie Moraga, Sandra Cisneros, and Gloria Anzaldúa are primary examples of Chicanas who have won “la lucha chicana.” Chicana writers, intellectuals, and the Chicana community have been responding to racial, gender, and social injustices and inequality. As minorities and women gain power in the United States, a post-ethnic phenomenon is taking place. For the past three decades gender, race, and class have been key issues, but now we finally might be experiencing a post-ethnic and post-gender time period in which Chicano/as are part of the mainstream middle class. The Obama and Clinton candidacy challenges our notions of identity politics. Obama’s campaign specifically thinks of the future as a

Post-ethnic social order that would encourage individuals to devote as much—or as little of their energies as they wished to their community of descent. Hence to be post-ethnic is not to be anti-ethnic, but to reject the idea that descent is destiny. The re-conceptualization affects the status of Latinos and other immigrant-based populations not generally counted as “races”.<sup>117</sup>

Obama concludes that today we seem closer to winning over inequalities. Clinton and Obama are both testimonies to the progress we have made by changing identity politics from the white male to Clinton, a white female, or Obama, a black male. As the United States re-writes identity politics, Chicana authors are re-writing Mexican-American history, fighting for a new post-racist, post-sexist, post-classist society. The next wave of

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<sup>117</sup> David A. Hollinger, “Obama, Blackness, and Post-ethnic America,” Chronicle of Higher Education, 1.

literature will focus on a post-ethnic, post-racial, post-gender, and post-class America. This new wave of literature is still fresh and although I have not discussed it in the body of the Thesis, I would like to mention its importance for the future of America.

In an article from Newsweek magazine, Richard Rodriguez, author of “Brown: The Last Discovery of America”, hears “often enough that America is becoming a post-racial nation. This election season was supposed to prove it. Yet I am struck by the contrary—how mired our politics remain in the dialectic of black and white.”<sup>118</sup> Rodriguez questions why Obama and many others do not identify themselves as brown. Rodriguez also states that “Barack Obama is brown. Mixed. There are millions of us in America who similarly belong to more than one race. Brown is not a new color to America. Our past is as brown as our future.”<sup>119</sup> Richard Rodriguez suggests a bi-cultural America in which most Americans are actually brown in the sense that they are mixed or mestizo. In contrast, America has only had white and black. Brown is rarely mentioned in the United States. Even Obama has failed to mention brown, but rather only black. Although many of Barack’s speeches include the various cultures living in the United States such as Latinos, he never mentions race beyond black and white. The fact of the matter is that:

there are grandchildren who do not look like any of their grandparents. And many family members have adopted children from China, Guatemala, or Bangladesh. In this world, the political necessity is for someone who might help us imagine lives larger than racial designations. A politician might win the day, if he or she were able to speak of the ways our lives are mixed.<sup>120</sup>

Different races, ethnicities, and cultures are mixing in the United States as adoption from abroad and interracial marriage become more common. In conclusion, Americans must

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<sup>118</sup> Richard Rodriguez, “See the Brown in U.S.”, Newsweek, June 2, 2008, 29.

<sup>119</sup> Rodriguez, 30.

<sup>120</sup> Rodriguez, 30.

be prepared to embrace our bi-cultural ways and embrace a post-ethnic society. This new society will call for complete equality and cooperation among all peoples of America.

When freedom is not defined so that all people of any race, gender, or class have the same rights, it becomes the freedom of privilege, the freedom of entitlement, authorized by the right of conquest and enforced by notions of superiority. The manifestations of this freedom in previous times were white skin entitlement, male entitlement, and upper class entitlement. Fortunately, contemporary post-ethnic culture is moving towards a more inclusive idea of freedom. In any case, we must fight prejudices by learning each others histories in an ultimate goal to come together and unify. We can only fully respect and love each other once we understand one another completely. This is the ideal that we should strive for in this “melting pot”. As President Lincoln so nicely put; "We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory will swell when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature". As Lincoln stated, memories and histories make up our identity, and therefore it becomes difficult to deny, for example, the Mexican-American War. Instead of denying the history, we must choose to understand our histories and work together as one America.

As Edna Acosta-Belén states:

In an era of increasing global interconnections, interdependence, and economic integration among nations and regions, paying due attention to the U.S. Hispanic heritage, to the increasing presence of Latinos in the United States, and to the existing transnational linkages the (im)migrant groups maintain with their Latin American or Caribbean countries of origin, immediately suggests new challenges and changes in our conventional narratives of history and culture of the Americas.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Edna Acosta-Belén, Revisiting the Concept of Nuestra América in Latino(a) and Latin American Studies, 2.

The parts of America must become one America, or as José Martí called it “Our America”. In order to bridge the countries of Latin America, the Caribbean, and the United States into “Our America”, we must learn to live together in harmony by surpassing our history. Cultural and racial diversity of our America is rooted in a history of “colonialism, racism, displacement, resistance, and hybridization” due to overlapping issues of race, gender, nationality, ethnicity, and class.”<sup>122</sup> Martí affirmed the importance of a multicultural and multiracial America. Martí’s theory is of great contemporary significance

as we strive to put an end to European and Anglo-American ethnocentricity by decolonizing and deconstructing the cultural mythologies and received knowledge about ourselves [which has perpetuated for thousands of years from] the dominant Western tradition.<sup>123</sup>

Dominant Western tradition reinforces the differences between white, black, brown, male, female etc, while Martí emphasizes the fact that we are all mestizo. Martí stressed unity and equality of America with the belief that a divided America would never be able to accomplish anything. Martí focused on the “mestizo America” created by the “creolization process—that unprecedented mixing of races and cultural syncretism that took place in the Americas, and which perhaps has never reached a similar magnitude in any other part of the world.”<sup>124</sup> “But within the colonial world there exists a case unique to the entire planet: a vast zone for which mestizaje is not an accident but rather the essence, the central line: ourselves, ‘our mestizo America’.”<sup>125</sup>

Martí, with his excellent knowledge of the language, employed this specific adjective as the distinctive sign of our culture—a culture of descendants, both

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<sup>122</sup> Acosta-Belén, 1.

<sup>123</sup> Acosta-Belén, 1.

<sup>124</sup> Acosta-Belén, 3.

<sup>125</sup> Carlos Monsiváis, “Would so many millions of people not end up speaking English?”, in The Latin American Cultural Studies Reader, 84-85.

ethnically and culturally speaking, of aborigines, Africans, and Europeans: It is impossible to assign us with any exactitude to a specific human family. The greater part of the native peoples has been annihilated; the European has mingled with the American and with the African, and the African has mingled with the Indian and with the European. Born from the womb of a common mother, our fathers, different of origin and blood, are foreigners; all differ visibly in the epidermis, and this dissimilarity leaves marks of the greatest transcendence.<sup>126</sup>

In conclusion, all the population of America, face similar histories due to issues of race, gender, nationality, ethnicity, and class. The cultures of the Americas must realize their interconnections with one another, rather than focusing on each other's differences. Once the cultures of the Americas identify with the each other, collaboration has a chance to flourish. My thesis portrays the Chicano experience through Chicano literature, with an aim to capture the collective nature of the Chicano experience. Of course, no one person has the same experiences as the next person, but all "Americans" share common experiences that binds us together as the colonized people and cultures of America. The United States is called the "melting pot" because the people of the United States are one "mestizaje".

As Senator Barack Obama states in a speech: the "legacy of discrimination is real and must be addressed with deeds by investing in our schools and our communities, by enforcing civil rights laws and ensuring fairness in our criminal justice system, by providing opportunities for this generation and the next...All Americans [are required] to realize that your dream doe snot have to come a the expense of my dreams. That investing in the health, welfare, and education of [colored] children will ultimately help all of America prosper".

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<sup>126</sup> Monsiváis, 85.

The consciousness-raising during the 1960's and 1970's through the civil rights and women's movements allowed Chicanos to join struggles for social justice while confirming their ethnic and racial identities. It is interesting to point out the sequence of the movements: starting with the civil rights movement and moving to the women's rights movement. It is possible to conclude that the Obama will win the election over Clinton as history may repeat itself. Is now the time for post-ethnic politics in the United States as Obama claims and the future a time for post-gender politics?

Anzaldúa sees unequal gendered power relations as caused by class inequalities: "All of us on the planet are connected, although we imagine otherwise. A 'false' class system was constructed to make human beings imagine that we are not connected. This system is characterized by artificial hierarchal binaries such as rich/poor, colored/white, tall/short etc." The distinctions which make us disconnected also make us unique. Rather than hating our differences, we must learn to love our differences. If we constantly poke fun at each others differences we are no more than little second graders who make fun of each other.



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